

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1828.—VOL. LXIII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 14, 1894.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"YOU ARE ALMOST TOO LATE," CRIED WINNIE, GAILY.

WHEN YEARS HAD FLOWN.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

WASLEY was such a very small town that everybody knew everybody, and no man's business was hidden from his neighbour; so that when Inkermann Cottage was let, everybody was on the *qui vive* to learn all there was to learn concerning the new tenants.

The house was not a large one, or in any way pretentious; it contained seven rooms in all, but from the fact that the Dowager Lady Easleton had once occupied it for three months, it was regarded as a highly desirable residence, for the aroma of aristocracy still hung about it.

It stood some way from the town, on what the worthy folks called the London road, and nobody knew how it came to bear such an imposing name because it was in itself by no means imposing.

It was low and long, with a rustic porch in the

centre on either side of which were two rooms—to the right a large cheerful kitchen, and a "keeping-room;" on the left the drawing room with wide windows opening into a small greenhouse, and a minute apartment used by the Dowager for the purpose of dining.

Above were three large chambers; but the greatest recommendation the house had was its grounds which were out of proportion to its size.

A high wall surrounded it, whilst wooden gates hid the front lawn and the broad short drive from public view; at the rear was a most extensive garden, partly ornamental, partly cultivated to supply the needs of the kitchen.

There was, too, a coach-house and stable, with two rooms above; the Dowager had used them for legitimate purposes, but it very quickly became known in Wasley that the new tenants possessed neither horse nor carriage and they sank considerably in the respect of Wasley.

They arrived on a chill but sunny May evening, the season had been unusually early, so that the lilacs had blossomed, scented the air, and then began to fade into shabbiness.

But the guelder roses were weighing down the

slender branches with their weight of snow, and the long yellow tassels of the laburnum drooped to caress the clusters of crimson May.

A few idlers had gathered close by, and waited in burning curiosity to see the fly disgorged of its occupants.

The first to descend was a rather morose-visaged woman of middle age, who began at once to rate the driver with his carelessness concerning a small package—she was evidently a servant, her appearance was eminently respectable but no one could mistake her vocation.

Then, too, from the fly came the low, pleasant, but firm tones of a refined voice to which she lent attention.

"Bathsheba, that will do; please allow me to settle matters," and out stepped a little lady, daintily and even elegantly dressed.

She was very small, with a plump, compact figure.

She had a rather pale face which, without being pretty, impressed one as out of the common; she had grey eyes and a dark brown hair which curled above the level dark brows, and was braided low upon the neck.

She spoke a few pleasant words to the cabman

then said something in a low voice to the third occupant of the fly.

In an instant an extremely young girl sprang out; she could not possibly have been more than sixteen and looked younger.

"Sisters," said a wisacre standing by, "the young one is very pretty."

The gossip had just time to see her complexion was extremely fair, her long waving hair light brown with a suspicion of gold in it, her eyes blue, and fringed with darkest lashes, when Bathsheba, the maid of vinegar aspect, opened the gate, and the little party was lost to view.

The young girl ran to a Persian lilac which shamed its fellows by its retaining its beauty and blossom until now.

"Oh!" she cried, "it is delicious; it smells exactly like rice pudding."

Her companion laughed.

"What a very prosaic comparison, Winifred; and now come in, for I am longing to rest, if you are not."

"It is a delightful place, for once the estate agent was truthful; we will remember that to his credit, and oh, Bathsheba, how soon can we have a cup of tea!"

"In a very few minutes, Miss Winifred, if you'll make way for me to unlock the door. I daresay we shall find the place in a pretty mess. I ain't got much belief in furniture folks way of fixing goods; if you'd only let me have come on with 'em, Missis, everything would ha' been done to your liking."

"Any little alteration needed can easily be done to-morrow," said the lady quietly; and then they all entered the wide hall where an eight-day clock was sonorously ticking.

Winifred must needs go on a voyage of discovery, running to and fro every few minutes to report matters.

But not until she had finished the cup of tea so quickly prepared, would her companion accompany her.

"Oh, auntie, you haven't a grain of curiosity or impatience about you; I have been all over the place, spying into every nook. And you've no idea how nice everything is, fancy Shebs, the men managed without your help," with a mischievous glance at the woman, "my dear soul, I always said you had too great an opinion of your own merits."

But Bathsheba only snorted contemptuously.

Before the close of the week Wasiley knew all that the new comers chose to tell of themselves, which did not amount to much; but the gossips "embroidered" that little until it sounded a great deal.

It was told that the ladies stood in the position of niece and aunt to each other, that Mrs. Yarrow was a widow, and it was generally believed she was about five-and-twenty—in reality she was thirty, but time had dealt most leniently with her.

It was known too, that she was a clever journalist, writing eight or nine hours daily in the little room she called her study and which had been the former tenants' dining-room; Bathsheba was the only servant kept, but a man went in every morning and evening to do a little necessary work in the garden, and as he was the only one in direct communication with the new comers, he was besieged with all manner of questions.

He said Mrs. Yarrow was "a real lady with no nonsense about her," and she and Miss Winifred were "mortal fond" of each other.

That Miss Winnie "was a orphan and had lived with her aunt ten years," and he gave it as his opinion that a nicer, prettier, more mischievous young lady never lived.

He told how she teased that woman with the queer name, "Bath something"—Miss Winnie generally called her Shebs, he could remember that because of Solomon—but dear me for the matter o' that the ladies themselves had odd names, because Mrs. Yarrow was called Yolande, and her niece had told him he ought to remember it because it rhymed with Poland, whatever that might be.

When Mrs. Yarrow was supposed to be well settled, people began to call; first came the Vicar and his sister, Mr. and Miss Worthy, for he was

not a married man; then followed the doctor and his wife; last and by no means least Colonel and Mrs. Samworth.

"My dear Mrs. Yarrow," said the elder lady, when Winnie had taken the Colonel to see her goats, and feathered pets, "what a pretty girl Miss Winnie is, and her manners are so delightfully natural. You must lend her to us often, for we have no children of our own—I quite envy you, only I think you are over young to be the guardian of an up-growing girl."

"I am thirty," said Yolande, with a smile, "and older than my years."

"Thirty! Impossible, I really believe you are romancing; why even Miss Worthy, who scarcely ever speaks nicely of the absent, said you were a mere girl and unfit for the responsibility thrust upon you; she said, too, it seemed impossible that you should have been wooed, married and widowed—oh! my dear, I ought not to have touched on your trouble," added Mrs. Samworth contritely, as a pained look came into the grey eyes, and the firm lips quivered.

"Do not be vexed with yourself; my trouble is an old one now, but I have not a happy way of forgetting it. It is ten years since I lost my husband—I was then just twenty and we had been married exactly twelve months."

"Poor child; that was very sad, I think it would break my heart if Thomas were taken from me; I believe, just because we have no children we have been drawn closer together. And after all, ours is not a dull house, for the Colonel always has three or four young fellows with him reading up for the army exams. Beyond his pension he has nothing, and so the pupils make a nice addition to our income. But I shall bother you with my own affairs—you have such a confidence-inspiring face, and I am convinced we shall be very excellent friends. Do not stand on ceremony with me—suppose you and Miss Winnie dine with us quite *en famille* to-morrow—I will take no denial."

"Auntie," broke in Winnie's gay young voice, "Colonel Samworth has promised me a little terrier puppy, if I may have it—may I? Say yea."

"I think you have quite a menagerie already," smiled Yolande; "but I suppose I shall have no peace until I consent; I am a victim to Winnie's wishes and caprices as you see." Lifting such beautiful grey eyes to the Colonel's that he felt to wondering why she had not married again, for the eyes were a power in themselves.

"Being victimised apparently agrees with you Mrs. Yarrow," he answered, with a courteous bow, "and you are so young that you must expect to be more of a sister than a guardian to your niece."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried little Mrs. Yarrow, with mock petulance, "am I always to be twitted with my seeming youth? I see that I must adopt elderly attire, a wig and spectacles to command respect."

Winnie laughed outright.

"Do you think I should allow her to spoil herself?" she asked, with a bright glance at their visitors, "why, she is out and out the prettiest woman I have ever seen, and Shebs is old and cross-grained enough to play propriety for both. Don't you think so, Mrs. Samworth?"

"I think you at least are capable of taking good care of your little self; and Winnie, you must use your best endeavours to bring auntie up to Oak House to-morrow."

"Indeed I will, for Colonel Samworth has promised to show me some Indian trophies, and tell me stories of his life out there through the mutiny."

"They are nice," said Winnie, as the Samworths drove away, "I like them immensely, especially that dear soldierly old man; don't you, auntie?"

"Mrs. Samworth is equally as nice as her husband, dear."

"Quite an acquisition to Wasiley," Mrs. Samworth said, "both are delightful."

"Mrs. Yarrow has a story and a sad one," he answered, gravely, "and I say, Mary, I hope none of the lads will fall in love with and rob me of my favourite."

CHAPTER II.

DULY the next evening Yolande and Winnie appeared at Oak House. Beside the Colonel and his wife there were present four young fellows, pleasant manly lads; but the brightest, handsomest of all was Hal Rounswell, whose frank face with its large dark eyes, and budding moustache, had made a great impression on the Wasiley damsels. Yolande was wearing a wonderful dress of some sherry material which shone green in some lights and golden in others.

Winnie, as became her youth, wore a simple white gown without a deck of colour, and her fair hair fell all about her shoulders, rippling down to her waist. The young men regarded her with open admiration, whilst the oldest and gravest of them stole furtive glances at Yolande from time to time, and listened eagerly for the sound of her low musical voice.

"Evidently," thought Winnie's aunt, "he, too, credits me with less than my years, and I am something of a wonder to him because of my profession," and then she smiled with bitter amusement, for gay and bright as she usually was, she had tasted deep of sorrow. She had loved and lost; trusted and been deceived, and nothing but her own indomitable pride and courage had carried her through her many trials. She had known poverty and loneliness, and these things yet lingered in her memory, yet stung her to hot revolt and bitterness. Only this evening she was gracious and kindly, singing songs which touched the listeners' hearts, in a sweet contralto voice, whilst Winnie played her accompaniments.

"I hardly ever touch the keys," she said to her hostess, "it is good practice for Winnie; she is to make music her profession, not that it is necessary whilst I live, but if I die early she will need something to fall back upon, because, when I am gone, she has no other living relative, and I shall leave her but a small sum—we are not very frugal people."

Her eyes, full of love, followed Winnie as she went with the Colonel and Hal Rounswell to inspect the aviary; the pretty delicate face was slightly flushed, and the black-fringed eyes were aglow with excitement.

"I think," said Mrs. Samworth, "you need have small fear for Winnie's future; she is sure to marry well, and I think very young."

"Not the latter, I hope," cried Yolande, "I never advocate very early marriages, and I want my child to have a joyous youth. She is only sixteen and I don't intend to countenance a lover for years to come."

"Then you had better place her under lock and key—and love laughs even at those. Why, my dear Mrs. Yarrow, I married at seventeen, and thank Heaven, there has never been an hour in which I repented doing so."

"And I," said Yolande, her face paling and her eyes growing black with emotion, "I married at nineteen and have repented ever since. Oh, why do you make me say such things! What is there in you which opens lips so long locked. Forget what I said in my haste, for even Winnie does not suspect the tragedy which has filled my life."

"Your secret is safe with me, dear," the other answered gently; "but because one man has proved cruel or evil you must not condemn the whole sex, and I prophesy a happy future for your Winnie—I will pray for a brighter time for you. Now let us go to the aviary; and be sure you praise the Colonel's silver pheasants in unmeasured terms, for they are the pride of his heart, and the motive-power of his existence."

After this the visits between Oak House and Inkermann Cottage were almost of daily occurrence; but the Samworths were careful only to call at such hours as Yolande intimated she was disengaged; for she had candidly confessed that her whole income was derived from her pen.

Mr. Worthy came often; too often for his sister's peace of mind, or Yolande's satisfaction. At thirty a woman is rarely deceived with regard to a man's feeling towards her, and very soon little Mrs. Yarrow knew that Christopher Worthy was drifting into love for her, and that not all she could say or do could alter that fact.

She could only avoid him on every possible occasion, and then when they met his eyes looked the reproaches his tongue refused to utter.

"My dear," said Mrs. Samworth to her husband, "Yolande may be our vicarress if she will; but she won't."

"Well, she deserves a better fate, not that I fail to appreciate Worthy; he is a good man, but he isn't clever enough for her, and she never could live with his sister Lavinia. I should be heartily sorry to see either Mrs. Yarrow or my little Winnie transplanted in such a place as the Vicarage; and that reminds me, Mary, that Hal Rouncewell is just a wee bit too fond of carrying messages for you to the cottage—he is young—only twenty—and a boy's passion is not to be relied upon. At present he believes himself in love with little Winnie, but you and I know what a proud man Volsen is, and he would never consent to a marriage between Hal and a portionless girl of no particular pedigree."

Mrs. Samworth looked troubled a moment, then she brightened.

"Oh dear, why do you make such mountains of molehills? Winnie is a lady and a dear girl; Mr. Volsen only made his money by cotton, and, of course, Hal is not dependent upon him. Then, too, you have often told me how fond the great man is of his brother—"

"His half brother, Mary. Volsen's mother was a factory girl. Hal's was the Lady Henrietta Rouncewell; the first woman helped her husband to place his foot on the ladder leading to fame and wealth. Later, oh, ever so much later, when poor Betty Volsen had been dead years, her husband married Lady Henrietta. She, too, had but one son; by her wish he was to bear her family name; and this Hal is just twenty years Hector Volsen's junior."

"Old Volsen had been reputed a rich man, but when he died, ten years ago, it was discovered he was all but insolvent, and Hector was called to a meeting of creditors. It seems, then, that his grandfather, a very old fellow, indeed, offered him a lump sum to continue the business, and bring it up to its former state, on the sole condition that he did not marry until he had cleared off every debt, and could boast an income of eight hundred a year."

"Hector Volsen is the fortunate possessor now, not of eight hundred, but fifteen thousand per annum, and could retire to-day if he chose; but he is the last person in the world to tolerate a sentimental marriage. There was a vague rumour at the time, I remember, that he was some way entangled, but he gave the lie to the statement, and it is probable he will not only live but die a bachelor."

"Hal has nothing beyond the allowance he receives from the man of cotton; so I would not have you encourage any love-making between the young people."

After he had gone Mrs. Samworth sat very thoughtful for awhile, then she murmured to herself,—

"If I breathe one word of this to Mrs. Yarrow, she will be frightened into sending Winnie away; the child herself may long for that which now she does not desire; and poor dear Hal be made miserable without a cause. Hector Volsen is only a man, not a deity, and even if he is ever so miserly and proud, he cannot fail to love little Winnie when once he has seen her; so I won't meddle, but just let things go on as they are, and they will right themselves."

"Mrs. Samworth!" cried Hal's voice outside, "they have roses at the Cottage; but no roses like yours; Mrs. Yarrow was particularly admiring them last evening, and I wondered if you would let me have a few to carry her, as I am passing by there on my way to Worthy's?"

"You may have as many as you please," answered Mrs. Samworth, with a little significant smile; "but Mrs. Yarrow does not like morning visitors."

"But I can leave them with Sheba, or—with Miss Winnie, you know."

"Of course," stooping low over her basket, "and should you see Winnie, tell her, please, she must come over to-morrow to choose her kitten."

She watched him go, with a half humorous, half-gentle smile upon her comely face. Hal was wont to say that, if she had been blessed with children, she would have been the fondest of mothers, and he was not far wrong. Then, too, from his first coming to Wasley she had been most kind to him, his frank bearing, his bold, handsome face and his curious loneliness appealing to her warm heart, for, with the exception of his half-brother, he had now no living relative.

Having gathered his roses he started for the Cottage, never intending (the young rogue) to go on to the Vicarage, and being a very frequent visitor he entered the wooden gates without touching the bell.

It was a very hot July morning, and Bathsheba, looking out of her kitchen-window, said, with scant ceremony,—

"The hall-door ain't locked, you can get in; I'm making raspberry vinegar and can't leave my stepman. Go quiet, the missus is at work, and Miss Winnie's picking strawberries; you know where to find her."

"Thank you, Sheba, yes," flushing ingenuously at the stress upon the pronoun; "and how is your toothache? better, I hope."

"Neither better nor worse," snapped Sheba, "and there's no call for you to pretend to remember it, because you didn't till you saw my swelled face."

"There you wrong me; look, I have brought you a bottle of stuff for it, and I only hope it will work the miracles it is supposed to do."

Then he crept quietly through the hall, not wishing to disturb Yolande, and Bathsheba, with a suspicious moisture in her eyes, took up the phial.

"Bless the lad and his bonny face! Miss Winnie's over young to marry yet, but I should feel safe like about her if he won her. I wouldn't have to eat out my heart with grief for her like I did over Miss Yolande. Ah! the day, the black day, when that villain came into her life and spoilt it. I'd spoil his ugly face now if I knew where to find him!"

Unconscious of her words, her thoughts, Hal strode over the back lawn into the long kitchen garden, and there was Winnie amongst the strawberry beds.

"You are almost too late," she cried, gaily; "I have eaten nearly all the ripe ones. It has been so wet the last three or four days that I have found scarcely any."

"I will help you hunt for them," he said, eagerly; "but first you must guess what I have brought you!" for all the while he had been holding his left hand behind him.

"One of the kittens! but no, you would hardly carry that! Oh!" peeping behind him, "how kind Mrs. Samworth is, and how good of you to bring them. But I am sorry I so admired her roses last night—it seems like robbing her, doesn't it?"

"No," stoutly! "they were freely given, and I was glad to bring them."

She held them close, her blushing face and dewy eyes buried in them, until he said,—

"Don't you think I deserve some reward for my walk?"

"Oh yes, it is so hot! What shall I bring you? there is new milk and some light ale in the house; we never drink wine."

"I am not thirsty; but I think it would be a nice and kindly thing for you to sit with me in the arbour yonder; we ought not to disturb Mrs. Yarrow."

"True," assented Winnie; "but my flowers must not be left to fade."

"In half an hour Mrs. Yarrow will pitch work; cannot we wait so long for the water?"

They looked each at the other, then they smiled, whilst the girl's face drooped low over her roses.

CHAPTER III.

If Yolande had not been so engrossed by her work and troubled with thoughts of Christopher Worthy, she must have seen what was fast becoming palpable to others—the growing love

between Hal and Winnie; but she really thought of her niece as a mere child, hardly realising that in October she would be seventeen, and that already love had entered her life and made more serious the gay, childlike disposition.

She was sitting alone one August day thinking over Lavinia Worthy's last visit, and smiling somewhat scornfully at her anxiety to impress upon her hostess the fact that Christie was a poor man, that the living was not what it should be, and he never looked for promotion because they had no influential friends.

She almost laughed aloud when she remembered Lavinia's face as she replied,—

"I am sure that those who know Mr. Worthy will value him for himself and not for his possessions; and many men marry and rear families on a less income than his. Why, he is a rich man, compared with my father who was also a clergyman—his stipend never exceeded a hundred and fifty pounds—we all had to work as we grew up, so you see poverty has no horror for me," and she had laughed as she saw Lavinia's increased dismay.

"She thinks I am anxious to usurp her place at the Vicarage," she said, as she trifled with her pen, "and because she is spiteful I won't under-ceive her yet; it is distinctly nasty of me, but I have borne so much in my life that I suppose the milk of human kindness does not abound in me. What a goose she must be to think I would give up my independent life, put another in my Winnie's place, and try to fill a part for which by nature I am all unfitted. No, no—Christopher Worthy is well enough in his place; but as a husband I should despise him, even if—even if—I were free,—the burnt child dreads the fire."

"Mr. Worthy," announced Bathsheba, and flushing crimson, Yolande rose to meet her clerical admirer.

He was a nervous man, but that bright blush born of vexation and confusion lent him courage, and as she suggested they should go into the garden and find Winnie, he still retained possession of her hand, pleading she would hear him.

She knew instinctively what was coming, and feeling there was no escape for her, braced herself to meet the ordeal.

"Mrs. Yarrow," he said, in a quick, stirred voice, "I have delayed in this matter too long; to-night courage is given me to speak. I love you dearly—so dearly that thinking of you forget my comparative poverty and venture to ask you to give me this little hand for all time. Will you be my wife?"

The grey eyes meeting his were wide and piteous.

"You honour me beyond my deserts, and yet when you know the truth you will understand that this proposal should never have been made. Mr. Worthy, even if I reciprocated your love, our marriage could not be. Keep my secret and forget your attachment. I am a wife, but not a widow."

He dropped her hand with a little hoarse cry.

"Great Heavens! do you know what harm you have done? Don't you see what harm you yet may do with your sweet ways and lovable face? Why are you filling so false a position? Why do you give out you are a widow?"

"I will answer you without delay," she said with a gentle dignity which carried weight with it. "My husband was ambitious and in great haste to be rich; I was penniless and obscure. I stood in his way, and so we parted, he going his way and I mine. That is ten years ago, and I have never seen or heard of him since, but," and here her voice for the first time broke, "I love him still, for it is ordained that those whom God hath joined together, no man shall set asunder;" then her little white hands went up to hide her quivering face, her shamed and anguished eyes.

"The man was a brute!" cried the clergyman, half forgetting his own pain in pity for hers; "and I—I can only ask forgiveness for him—under the circumstances—an insult to you and a sin to me. You have crept into my heart, Yolande, until I wonder how I lived until we met, and it will be hard indeed to dethrone you; my soul sinks at the prospect before me, and yet

if you will let me be your friend I think I may promise never again to hurt you by word or look. Still I would ask you, is it well to figure as a widow? Other men may suffer even as I do."

"And other men will forget," she said bitterly, as she uncovered her face. "But that I esteem you, I should only have answered in the negative, not holding that any explanation was necessary. No, Mr. Worthy, a grass widow meets with little respect and scant pity. My husband will never, I think, seek me out; even if he did it would be hard to find me, as the name I now bear is not my own, but that of the good man who married my sister, Winnie's mother. They were cousins; but their names were different, only this, Winnie does not know. As a girl I was called Yolande Kennedy. Now you have my whole story in a nutshell, see that you respect my confidence; and now go, I am shaken by to-night's events, and I am sick with looking on the ghosts of my past; I want to be alone."

Her voice died out wearily; but for the gathering dusk he would have seen the tears streaming down her face. As it was, he felt she was too moved for further speech and his own heart was heavy indeed.

He pressed her hand; lightly laid his lips to it, and left her; with a heavy sigh she sank upon the couch, saying to herself with faint hysterical laughter—

"Lavinia had no need for fear. How glad she will be, although no doubt she will speak of me as 'that horrid little widow,' and call me coquette. Well, who cares? My conscience is clear, and—and—oh, Heaven help me! my heart is true always to him."

In the morning Colonel Samworth, with a very grave face called Hal into his room.

"Rouncewell," he said, earnestly. "I believe you will grant that I have a very great interest in, and affection for you?"

"You bet I will," answered Hal, heartily, although he was rather astonished by the opening of the Colonel's conversation.

"Very well, granting that you will not consider me unduly meddlesome when I speak to you with regard to Miss Yarrow?"

The handsome frank face flushed with boyish confusion.

"Well, sir?"

"Is it well? Winnie Yarrow is a lady, one of the sweetest little girls on earth; but I doubt, Rouncewell, if your brother would approve such an alliance for you, and I do you the justice to believe you would not play with her."

"I'd punch any fellow's head who suggested such a thing; and Hector never could set his heart against her. He is a jolly good sort to me—if you understood him better you would like him more—and I mean to marry Winnie or no woman at all."

"Then I must acquaint Mr. Volsen with your decision."

"I wish you would, for I'm blessed if I know how to do it," answered Hal.

"I may conclude you have not spoken either to Winnie or her aunt?"

"I have not had a chance, and I couldn't speak to Mrs. Yarrow in cold blood. I won't take any answer either from other lips than Winnie's, and I'm sure Hector has only to see her to fall in love with her."

The Colonel was not so sure; but before he could reply another pupil entered, and Master Hal, fired with a sudden resolve, made good his escape, and started boldly for Lukermann Cottage.

His heart was throbbing madly against his side as he entered the garden where he had caught the flutter of Winnie's blue gown, and with a sudden great fear lest she should not prove kind, he halted outside her arbour, and she would do nothing to help him, only sat there with idly-folded hands, and downcast face, afraid lest he should see how crimson her cheeks had grown, and how glad were the eyes veiled by the dark lashes.

With a nervous "good-morning," Hal gathered courage to advance, and perhaps something in the girl's attitude and manner inspired him with fresh boldness, for entering he took possession of her small hands, whilst he said—

"Winnie, won't you look at me when I tell you that I love you; my sweetheart, my sweetheart, you never can guess how much!"

She did not repulse him, rather it seemed to him that she rested against him, so this very bold young fellow dropped her hands only to encircle her waist, to bow his head until his bonny face touched her's as he stole that first long ecstatic kiss.

"You do love me! You will give yourself to me!" he whispered, and then she lifted her sweet, serious face, and looking at him fully with eyes as true as the Heavens above, she murmured,—

"I love you with all my heart; I shall love you always!"

High in the sweet warm air a lark was making mad melody. All around and about them stretched the lovely, peaceful land, deep in their hearts was the love so strong, so true, so tender that nothing could shake it, death could not kill it, and neither dreamed of shadows to come, of the storm to burst over their heads, and yet sorrow and tears were very near, and each was to taste the anguish of parting, the despair of soul which makes even death seem good and desirable.

Then Yolande must be told; and she heard with something very like grief, and certainly with amazement. Still Hal's eloquence and Winnie's eyes pleaded with her for consent, and at last she said,—

"I would rather give my little girl to you than to any other lad I know; but you are both so young yet that I must insist upon a long engagement. I married young, Hal, and ruined my life;—I desire a better fate for Winnie. And, beside all this, you must remember I shall countenance no engagement that is not confirmed by your people. You must tell them plainly Winnie is quite penniless, and when they have heard the truth they may speak, and by their speech we shall abide. Winnie, darling, I seem cruel, but you can trust me?"

"With my life, auntie," she answered, firmly; then with a quick change to tears; "but do not dream of trouble, dear; it would break my heart to lose Hal, and I shall not love you less. Won't you wish us joy?"

"From my soul," and she kissed first the tearful girl, and then she drew down the lad's dark head, touching his brow gently with her lips. The next moment she stole away weeping, for Winnie had been her only possession, and lo! another stronger than she had wrested her from those embracing arms.

On the following morning Colonel Samworth presented himself at the Cottage.

"Well, my dear madam," he said, "our Winnie has proved herself a precocious young lady! these young people are a nuisance. But I came up to tell you that I wrote the lad's brother last night, and have received a telegram informing me that he will be with us this evening. I—I fear he is not too pleased with the engagement. Hector Volsen is a purse-proud man."

"What name did you say?" almost shrieked Yolande, stretching out her hand.

"Hector Volsen—he and Hal are only half-brothers."

"Hector Volsen!" she repeated. "I would rather see Winnie dead than married to one in whose veins his blood runs."

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER those strange and wild words Yolande sank back white and faint, Colonel Samworth regarding her with something more than astonishment. Then he said in a puzzled tone,—

"I think, madam, you have been unfortunately prejudiced against Volsen; I know him as an honourable man."

"And I, sir, know him too well for my peace of mind," she broke in. She had risen now and was standing before him with her slim hands clenched, and her eyes dilated. "Personally, I like Hal Rouncewell—once" her lips quivering, "I loved his brother, and he professed to love me; but he failed me utterly. More I shall not

tell you; think of me as you will—I am used to harsh judgments and unjust criticisms—only remember that anything I may do now which seems strange to you is done out of love for Winnie, and a deep desire to save her from a lot so hard as mine. But I will not give you unnecessary trouble or pain; a line from me will await Mr. Volsen, with your permission, at Oak House; you will see he has it."

"But dear Mrs. Yarrow, have you no thought of Winnie's suffering?"

"Better she should suffer now than later when she could find no redress, and she loves me well enough to believe that all I do is for her good."

"I hope and pray it is, madam; but would it not be wiser to interview Volsen; the whole matter might then assume a different aspect?"

"It never could; oh, you must not think I am acting thus without just cause. You have been my friend all along, be my friend still, for never did I need one more sorely."

"You have only to command and I will obey. Shall I send Mrs. Samworth to you?"

"No, thank you; do not think me ungrateful, but I want to be alone. I must have time for thought; there is so much to do, and so few hours left in which to do it."

He bade her a sad good-by, she having told him nothing of her plans; and he was not a little afraid for Winnie, the child who had crept into his heart, and whom his favourite Hal, so dearly loved. And she, this poor, pretty woman, who had fought so long against the world and fate, remained alone, trying to find out a way in which she could not only save Winnie, but bring back joy to her heart.

It was drawing near noon when the girl entered the room to find Yolande still in an attitude of thought. She stretched out her hand and drew her down beside her.

"Dear," she said, in a quivering voice, "since yesterday much has changed in your life and mine. Not twenty-four hours ago, I told you that if Mr. Rouncewell's friends consented to your engagement I would raise no further objection; but oh, Winnie, my darling little Winnie, for my sake, you must say good-by to him. I have learned something which makes union between you impossible—it is no more his fault than yours; but never with my consent shall you give him your hand."

Winnie's face grew white as her own; but she said,—

"If it is not his fault or mine why should either suffer?"

"I cannot explain to you; but as true as Heaven is above us if you marry Hal Rouncewell you will be a wretched woman. My child, my child, we must go away, he must never find you; somewhere we will hide our pain, and being so very young you will soon forget."

"Forget!" echoed the girl in her low and now pathetic voice. "What is it to forget? To be untrue to oneself, one's oath, one's lover. Auntie, I beg you here, upon my knees, do not ask this awful thing of me. It will break my heart; it will spoil Hal's life, and it can be no pleasure to you to do either."

She was kneeling beside Yolande with her face hidden in her skirts; but, suddenly, the latter rose, and walking to a window, stood there silently awhile listening to Winnie's suppressed sobs. Then, without turning her head, she said,—

"I have loved you with almost a mother's love, and now, as in all else, I seek only your good. Will you try to believe me? Will you try to think that in separating you and Mr. Rouncewell I am securing your best happiness? Or are you going to doubt me when the first difference of opinion arises between us? Winnie," and here she, wheeling round with clasped hands and eyes all heavy with tears, said, "Choose now your way, Heaven knows I will never reproach you, child of my love and care. But now, in this hour you must say whether you can give me implicit obedience, or if you will cast in your lot with Hal Rouncewell, trusting yourself to his untied love."

As the young girl's eyes rested on the distorted tear-stained face, as she recalled the unwavering gentleness and love which had marked

Yolande's manner towards her, ever since as a girl of twenty she had taken the child of six into her care, all her heart cried out to her that now was the appointed time to show gratitude to give back love for love. With a heart-breaking cry, she said,—

"It shall be as you wish, dear auntie. I owe you all I have, all I am."

Yolande was quite quiet now, although there were tear-stains on her cheeks.

"My darling, you have answered as I hoped and thought you would," and folding Winnie in her arms she held her fast until the paroxysm of her grief had abated. Then she said,—

"Dear heart, we must leave here by four. I cannot tell you my plans yet; but you will trust me. Now write your letter to Hal, and in kindness to him make him understand that there is no hope for him!"

"Had he been any other than himself," said the poor child, "would you have been so hard?"

"Not if I had believed him worthy of you. Now, Winnie, I will leave you; for there is much to be done before we go, and many instructions to give Bathsheba."

"You will not even let me see Hal once, only to say good-bye, auntie?"

"It would be unwise, and would give you unnecessary pain; it cannot be."

And still with that fixed look on her sorrowful face she went out. Winnie drew out pen and paper and began to write, but the composition of her letter was evidently as difficult as it was painful, for many times she paused to hide her face in her hands and sob aloud, or moan out,—

"Hal! Hal! oh, my bonny love; it is too hard, too hard!"

But the task was ended at last. Then Yolande came in; she was very white but no longer trembled or wept.

"I have brought your hat and cloak, Winnie, and have put up a few necessary things. Your note and mine will be conveyed to Oak House by Bathsheba, who will remain here till it is safe to join us. Come, my dear, we have no time to lose if we would escape meeting Mr. Volsen. He utterly refuses to ratify your engagement. There was no need for that as we know; but I would not have you suffer greater pain or indignity than you have known."

She put out her hand to the weeping girl to draw her away; but Winnie had turned to the table and was abstracting a portrait from the album. Then having kissed it once with passion, she said very meekly,—

"I could not leave this behind; it is all I have to remind me of him. And now, dear, I am ready."

Bathsheba walked with them to the gates; her face was grim and hard, but she kissed Yolande's hand in parting, and went back to the house sobbing bitterly.

Duly, Mr. Volsen arrived at Oak House and had a conference with the Colonel and Mrs. Samworth, before the return of Hal from a long and solitary ramble.

He was unfeignedly annoyed at the turn affairs had taken, and at length announced his fixed conviction that Mrs. and Miss Yarrow were but a pair of adventurers. Then the Colonel spoke out hotly,—

"Both are ladies in the highest sense of the word, and far from seeking to entrap your brother into an engagement Mrs. Yarrow says that she would rather see her niece dead than married to one in whose veins your blood runs. She knows you well, she says."

"It is a lie," cried Hector Volsen fiercely. "I never heard her name before;" and then Hal came in, and he and his half-brother were closeted together.

"Hal, my boy," said the elder; "did I ever do you anything? Was I ever harsh or unreasonable to you? Would you give up this girl because I ask it?"

"No, Hector, no; I am bound to her in all honour and love. You have been goodness itself to me, and any rupture between us would give me keenest pain, but I can't and won't give Winnie up."

"Not if I prove to you that she and the woman she calls aunt are adventuresses!"

"I won't hear them spoken of lightly," the young fellow cried hotly. "Why, Winnie is an angel, and Mrs. Yarrow is the dearest little woman in the world."

"Probably you would find her so," remarked Hector, drily. Then with a sudden change of voice, "Hal, believe that I am seeking your good, that nothing but affection actuates me. Prove to me that these women are what they seem and I will raise no further objection; on the other hand if they are what I believe, I will not tolerate their entrance into my family; and rather than see you commit such folly as you meditate, I will withdraw your allowance. You cannot marry on nothing, and neither can you enter the army. For what other vocation are you fitted?"

Hal stood a moment, his youthful face very set and stern, his eyes very miserable, because, although so dearly attached to Winnie, he was still "awfully fond" as he expressed it "of Hector, who was a jolly good chap, and to whom he owed everything."

But presently he said bravely, though his lips quivered—

"Old man, you have been both father and brother to me, and we will not quarrel; neither will I give up Winnie. If she will wait until I can make a way for myself and a home for her, nothing shall part us."

"Put her to the test," answered his brother sarcastically, "she will fail you miserably. Hal, my boy, won't you believe I am wiser than you?"

"Not in this thing, brother, and I can forgive you much because you do not know, have not even seen her. At least you will do her the justice to accord her an interview."

"I will go with you at once;" but even as he spoke two notes were brought into them; the one for Hal the other for his brother.

The young lover tore his open with greatest haste, hoping only for good news; but as he read, his face whitened, his eyes grew fixed with horror, for had not Winnie written to say that she was going away from Wasley, and he would never, never see her again, because auntie declared for some great reason their marriage could never be.

She wished him good-bye and prayed his forgiveness in brokenhearted words. She hoped that he would be happy, and Heaven would help her bear her burthen.

Suddenly with a fierce cry he turned to Hector, and then stood silent, for there lay the proud man back in his chair, his eyes closed, his cheeks ashen, and there was Mrs. Yarrow's note fallen to the floor.

Hal sprang to his side,—

"Hector! what is it? For heaven's sake speak."

CHAPTER V.

ALMOST before his words died out, Hector Volsen recovered consciousness.

"The note! Give it me! What a woman I have been to play the weak fool thus. Hal, take me to—these ladies. I withdraw everything I said in my haste, if the girl is as good as her aunt."

"Here, drink this!" interrupted Hal, giving him brandy, "you are shaking as if with ague; and, Hector, I can't move in the dark. You must tell me more before I can work at all; I don't understand this change of front."

"Then," cried Volsen, "hear the truth, read it for yourself. Yolande Yarrow, as she is pleased to call herself, is my lawful wife!"

So stupefied was the young man that he made no reply to this very startling announcement, and indeed, he was compelled to read Yolande's letter twice before he fully grasped its meaning.

"MR HUSBAND,—

"It has chanced, through cruel fate, that your brother has learned to love my niece even as in the old days you professed to love me. Not, until the mischief had been wrought, and my consent to their engagement conditionally won, did I learn his identity. And then, remembering how, in the past, you treated

me, your wife, I looked for no mercy for Winnie from you, no love or recognition for myself. I believed and believe still that as you regretted your alliance, so Hal Rouncewell would one day regret his. When you left me, I swore neither to weary nor to disgrace your name; to that oath I have rigidly adhered. I have supported myself, honourably, I have found comfort in my niece's love, and I have hidden my identity under an assumed name. I have no more to say save this, that, as I have left you free for ten long years, I will leave you free always, unless trouble befall you, friends fail you; then, and only then, may you hope for pity or help from your wife, YOLANDE.

Hal sank into a chair. "What does it mean, Hector; is it a dream?"

"It is truth. I married and deserted Yolande Kennedy for ambition's sake; and then, when I dared claim her, when all my heart was hungry for her, I could not find her. Hal! Hal! it was a black and bitter deed; but even you would pity me if you knew all I have suffered since. Let us go together to her, she was always mild and merciful; she will forgive, she never nursed a harsh thought against any, do not delay, it is growing late."

"Now, may Heaven help us both! They may already be gone from Wasley. This is Winnie's note of farewell. Hector, I have honoured you above all other men, and in one hour I learn you are a scoundrel, a hypocrite, the ruin of every life you enter."

"Strike hard, lad; I have never had a friend since I left her."

"Oh! I did not mean all I said, but I am mad with the sense of all this misery and wrong. I don't wonder that pretty Yolande sent me so smartly about my business, carrying Winnie out of my reach; but—old man, it perhaps is not too late to find them. Let us go up to the Cottage;" and, rushing out, he stayed in the hall a moment only to tell a servant that he and Mr. Volsen would return and explain all presently.

Then they were out in the gathering night, almost running towards the house, which so lately had sheltered Yolande and her niece.

Bathsheba answered the door to them. Her sour face soured than ever; but at sight of Volsen she started back somewhat, saying with a snarl "It's you again, is it? What harm are you aiming at now? Aren't you done enough yet? Do you think I'm like to forget how true and constant you were to missus?"

"I have suffered too much, woman, from the reproaches of my own conscience to endure yours," Volsen answered heavily; "and to your mistress only will I answer for my misdeeds. Tell her I am waiting here."

"I'd have a mighty powerful voice to reach her," laughed Bathsheba, shortly. "It's hours since she went away, taking Miss Winnie with her. She's well quit of you both I reckon, and I never could see what she found in you to care for. You always had an old face and an old head; they ain't improved with years; but she's as pretty as a picture, and, but for you might ha' married again and again well an' happily."

"Bathsheba," cried Hal, "forget the past; my brother wants to do justice to your mistress. He acknowledges his sin, and he has loved her all along."

"Just as a cat loves a mouse, Master Rouncewell, to torture and to kill. You're a nice boy, but there's no telling what sort of man you'll make. So we are going to keep Miss Winnie safe from you."

"Woman—Bathsheba," entreated Volsen, "hide nothing from me. I assure you my one idea is to make atonement for my sin, to give happiness where I scattered misery broadcast. Only tell me where I may find my wife and you shall not repeat breaking your promise of secrecy to her."

He tried to thrust some gold coins into her hand. She flung them back at him with a gesture of scorn.

"To the deuce with your oaths and your gold," she cried in a fury. "Years back my dear might have starved for all you cared; and I hope that the dark day will never come when she will listen

to and forgive you. As for me, I'll die rather than help you to find her. If I had my will, you and yours wouldn't long lumber the earth," saying which she slammed the door upon them, bolting and barring them out.

They looked at each other in fear and amazement. Then, said Hector,—

"It is useless to remain here, Bathsheba Norton will tell us nothing; let us get back to Samworth. I am going to make a clean breast of the matter to him and ask his help. Then, Hal, by the affection I have always borne you, I pray you work with me; and in Heaven's mercy I will make atonement to the uttermost, and help you towards the happiness you crave."

Only a hand-clasp passed between them, but each understood the other, and in silence they made their way back to the Oak House.

The Colonel, looking from one agitated face to the other, felt that something of greater moment than he had anticipated had occurred, but when Hal, dropping into a chair, said with a groan,—

"They are gone, and Sheba refuses to say more," he cried out:

"I feared she (Mrs. Yarrow) would do something rash; she so evidently regarded you with disfavour, Volsen."

"She had cause," answered the other, heavily. "She is my wife, and I left her for the sake of filthy lucre."

His speech fell like a bomb in their midst; the Colonel sat staring at him as though he believed him demented; Mrs. Samworth, with a gesture of repulsion, moved further from him and seemed about to go, when he spoke again.

"Do not leave us yet; let me first make a clean breast of the matter, and then help me with your advice, for Yolande must be found. Eleven years ago I married her without the knowledge of my father and his new wife, Lady Henrietta. I was twenty-nine then, old enough to know my own mind, whilst Yolande Kennedy was but nineteen. She led a secluded though busy life, for her father was a poor man and had a large family.

"When I proposed for his daughter he asked me but few questions concerning my position or income, being the most unworried of men, and we were married as quietly as folks of the peasant class.

"I took my bride to Brixton, where her life must have been fairly lonely as I was often away on business; but she never complained, and, but for the dread of discovery, which meant the loss of my allowance, I was perfectly happy.

"At the end of twelve months I was hurriedly summoned to my father's deathbed, but did not reach him whilst he was conscious. I still made no disclosure concerning my marriage, waiting to see how the land lay.

"After the funeral it was found that instead of dying the mill-maire he was reputed to be, his affairs were much embarrassed. It was then my godfather, an eccentric individual and a woman-hater, offered me his help, provided I could declare myself free of any entanglement in the form of an engagement, and that I would sign a document to the effect that I would contract no marriage until in a fit position to do so.

"I thought of Yolande, and my heart was heavy enough, but I was ambitious and covetous. I asked time for reflection and was given until the next morning. All night my good and bad angels warred within me, when I went down to breakfast the battle had not been decided, but when Lady Henrietta implored me with tears to think of her and little Hal, I yielded to the promptings of the bad angel, and tried to save my conscience with the thought that I was doing my duty by all.

"That morning I signed what was worse than my death-warrant, and then I wrote to Yolande, explaining all that had befallen me. I prayed her to have patience, and when once I was free I would openly claim her; that from time to time, as chance afforded, I would visit her; that I would make her a generous allowance, and she in return must not declare our true relationship as that would mean ruin for me, and I would not suffer such degradation for the sake of a few sentimental scruples. If she agreed to these conditions, well and good, if not we must part.

"I had always found her docile because of her great love for me, and I never anticipated any rebellion; consequently, I was unprepared for her reply. It took the form of one word only, 'Good-bye,' there was neither entreaty nor reproach; but I knew even before I went in search of her that she intended making our separation final.

"Angry at the course she had taken, I travelled down to Brixton. She was gone, and I had no clue to her place of refuge. There was no home for her in her native village, for three months back her father had breathed his last, and the family had dispersed. I had never cared to inquire for them, but I remembered one girl was living at Lady Downton's as governess; I went to her; but she either would or could not give me any information concerning her sister.

"From that time until to-night my wife has never broken the long, long silence between us, and I have never seen her face. Truly, my punishment—"

"Is less than your sin!" broke in Mrs. Samworth, hastily. "You sold your soul for gold—and your gold turns to dust; you sacrificed your wife on the altar of ambition; for reward you may eat of apples of Sodom. And you, sir, you with so black a record as you confess, dared refuse to sanction your brother's engagement with a girl whose dearest friend you have wronged beyond reparation."

"I did not know her identity," miserably, weakly.

"Did not know! What right had you to insult her gratuitously—to—"

"Hush!" said the Colonel; "no reproaches can undo the past; look to the future!"

CHAPTER VI.

As the Colonel said, no reproaches could help them, their one duty was to find Yolande, and to this purpose they must bend all their energies.

Of course, Inkermann Cottage was carefully watched, but this availed nothing; evidently Yolande had been suspicious of espionage, and, consequently, a week after her flight, an auctioneer came down to value and dispose of her household goods, handing the proceeds to Bathsheba Norton.

And when the house was utterly dismantled, the last purchaser had disappeared, she grimly locked the door, and as grimly walked the short distance to the station.

It was discovered there that she had booked for Liverpool-street, and Hal, with his desperate young face, white and distorted, followed her to her compartment, entreating him she would give him Winnie's address, and he would take all the blame. But she listened unbendingly to him.

"No, no, sir; my duty is to them as I serve, and I know no law but that my misus sets down for me. Do you let me go unmolested, and take the word of Bathsheba Norton, you'll have forgot Miss Winnie before you're twelve months older. It's a easy way you Volsens have got," and then not another word would she say; but as the train steamed out of the station he saw her to the last, sitting erect and stern in her corner apparently as unmoved by his misfortunes as though she had a stone in lieu of her heart within her breast.

But it comforted him to know that in the same train travelled Hector Volsen, bent heart and soul upon finding the wife he had so long ago rejected and so long desired.

Reaching Liverpool-street Bathsheba took a cab, and he, following in a second, saw her alight outside a respectable-looking house. Her luggage being carried in he was convinced that either she was to join her mistress there or to await further instructions.

Allowing her time to settle her belongings he then boldly rang the bell, asking to see Bathsheba Norton, saying, as he slipped a coin into the dirty ready palm of the answering maid,—

"You need not announce me. Take me up to her at once. Oh! there is nothing wrong," as

she hesitated, "I have only a few questions to ask with reference to her late mistress."

So he was led upstairs and ushered into a room where Bathsheba was kneeling before her open trunk. Without turning her head she said (supposing Hector to be the maid),—

"You can go away. I don't want any peeping an' prying. I pay for the rooms so they're mine."

Volsen advanced, saying in a peculiarly low voice,—

"Bathsheba!"

She turned with a cry, flinging out her hands, and still kneeling with her uplifted face, full of hate and scorn, gasped,—

"What in the foul fiend's name brings you here, Hector Volsen?"

"Remorse for the past, love for my wife! Is she here?"

"Here! Is it likely when I let her know you were on her trail when I watched an' reported all your dodges! No, she ain't here, thank Heaven; an' with my good will you shall never see her again."

"But I tell you woman, I want to undo the past; that never since I lost her have I known a peaceful hour. I am a rich man now; I can give her all her heart desires."

"Can you give her back the lost ten years of her life, or wipe out the memory of your sin against her? She suffered, ah, Heaven! if you could only feel just for one hour all you made her bear I should be satisfied, she drooped an' pined, an' all but died—in all, through all going on loving you as did not know what love meant, an' who'd gone out of your way to kill her with your wickedness. Hector Volsen, I'd let my tongue be cut out rather than speak the word which should give her back to you."

He quailed beneath the honest indignation on her withered face, in her flashing eyes; and all unused as he was to pleading said, humbly enough,—

"I do not wonder that you are so incensed against me; I deserve the bitterest words that you can utter. But in very truth, Bathsheba, I would give the remainder of my life but to prove to your mistress my repentance and my love. I will not insult you by so much as attempting to bribe you, for you are integrity itself; but for the sake of her whom you have so loyally served, I implore you to send a message from me. Will you promise to do so?"

"It ain't much to do. Yes, you can write it here, but I hope she will never be foolish enough to pay heed to anything you say."

He wrote hurriedly a few moments, then folding the paper gave it into her charge. The message was brief, but to the point.

"Wife, forgive me; try me once again, by the love you once bore me, and the love which, despite all contrary seeming, yet fills my heart. Sweet, life is too heavy a burthen without you. Let us be glad together, and in our gladness make complete the joy of those we love."

He was too astute to leave Bathsheba free to go and come at will; so he engaged rooms opposite hers, and watching and waiting tried to be patient until Yolande's answer reached him.

On the third day it was handed in to him, and it ran briefly,—

"It is too hard to forgive; I dare not trust you again, for if you failed me, my second state would be worse than the first. Good-bye."

So hard! so hard! oh, how his sin had changed that gentle heart, warped that generous unsuspecting nature.

He deserved it all and yet—oh! Heaven, how should he bear it and live.

He spent the long night in terrible retrospection, unable to sleep or rest, rising in the morning unrefreshed, and sore at heart.

Crossing to his window he looked over to Bathsheba's, and his haggard face grew more ghastly as he saw it contained a white card bearing the word "Apartments."

Snatching up his hat he hurried across inquiring breathlessly for Miss Norton.

"She went away at six-thirty, sir," said the dingy maid, "and she told me you'd be sure to call, and all the message she left for you was she had gone to join her misus, and it wouldn't be

no use to try to find her; I can't tell more'n the dead where she's off to; no, and I never see the cabby afore in my life."

Without further speech, for indeed he felt it useless, he turned away, and in a blind fashion ascended to his own room.

There, casting out his arms before him, he buried his face in them, and burst into the hoarse and terrible sobs of a strong man.

He had scarcely believed Yolande could be so inexorable as she was now proving herself; but he did not doubt her love, or the pain which it had cost her thus to refuse his prayer and stifle the voice which pleaded in her heart for him.

"Lost! lost!" he said again, and again, "and by my own abominable sin. May Heaven have mercy on me now, for hope and courage alike have failed me."

How curious it was that Hal's life should thus cross hers; that all unwittingly she should have welcomed him to her home, little guessing who and what he was—for with regard to his relatives Hector had been always reticent—so that the mere existence of Lady Henrietta had been hidden from her.

Suddenly he rose, and with a gesture of self loathing, a look of utter despair said aloud,—

"I will go home; I am too weak to fight against fate. I must leave the search for her in other and more skilful hands."

He paid his modest bill, and then he went out, from Liverpool-street he telegraphed to Hal.

"Meet me at home to-night; important business to discuss," and still haunted by thoughts of Yolande, he began his long and tedious journey.

Hal drove to meet him, having arrived an hour earlier, and as they looked miserably at each other, they understood without a word passing how hopeless had been the quest of one, the waiting of the other.

"Well," said Hal, when they were fairly on the road, "what news?"

"The very worst; I have had a letter—if a couple of lines can be termed one—in which my wife utterly repudiates me. I have found Bathsheba only to lose her, and I haven't a clue to her destination. They have escaped us; and there is no hope—"

"Don't bid me despair," said Hal, between his set teeth, "for with me despair and death are synonymous terms. I did not think that little woman could be so hard—she seemed to love Winnie so dearly—I don't care how much she may have been wronged; it can't justify her separating Winnie and me. Hector, what do you propose doing? Have you no suggestion to make?"

"We might call in help from Scotland Yard." "Scotland Yard!" with the unjust contempt of extreme youth, "can any good come out of that? Doesn't the simplest affair mystify its blessed officers? Now a private detective—"

"Thank you, no; I engaged one years ago—when I first lost her—he drew large fees and that is all he did. I will wire for a smart man. I'll spend every half-penny I own, in the endeavour to find and conciliate her—we will advertise largely—you addressing your appeal to the girl. She cannot be so difficult to move for at least you have hurt neither her nor my wife."

They had reached Volsen Towers now, and springing down, Hal gave the reins to a groom, and followed his brother into the handsome dining-room.

He was looking moodily down upon the floor but as the youth entered, veering round he placed both hands upon his shoulders and as their eyes met, he said,—

"Forgive me lad, that I have brought you to this pass; at least let me hope and believe, that little as I deserve it I yet possess your affection, although your esteem is gone."

"Old boy, as if I could forget how good you were to mother and me! but oh! for Heaven's sake, why did you make havoc of your life and Yolande's?"

"I was mad with greed; the lust of gold fired my blood, and I swept every obstacle out of my way just to win and hold it. Now see how poor I have left myself, and let me at least think that I may 'point a moral and adorn a tale' for you.

Hal, Hal my boy, it is all over with me—now would to Heaven that death would find me out."

But although he both spoke and felt despairingly, he roused himself the next morning to action, and on the arrival of the man from Scotland Yard was the first to make suggestions and draw out plans.

Then the weary, weary search began; people grew accustomed to the continual appeals to "Yolande" or "Winnie" to give some sign of their existence, to send some message of hope or forgiveness; the detective clever as he was, began to feel at fault when month following month found him no nearer the solution of the mystery and Hector Volsen wore the look of a heartbroken, conscience stricken man.

Hal was fortunately compelled to work hard, and despite his doubts scraped through his examination, got his commission and joined his regiment—but his gay, *débonair* manners were things of the past, and he was voted slow, and a kill-joy amongst the men.

CHAPTER VII.

In a house close by Cliff Bridge Terrace, Scarborough, Yolande had found her place of refuge.

Bathsheba was with her, and Winnie; and their apartments were of the most pleasant in the neighbourhood.

Yolande had fondly hoped that being so young, amid new surroundings the girl would forget her trouble; she had seemed so mere a child to this loving woman that she erred in believing the child's nature was still uppermost in her.

And Winnie remembering all she owed Yolande, all she still must owe, tried her utmost to appear happy succeeding only in a very sad fashion.

Yolande took her to this or that amusement, to this or that new scene, and always she would smile that little grateful smile which was worse to see than any tears and thank her aunt in pretty pathetic fashion for her goodness.

But no matter where they went, her thoughts were always full of Hal; on the Spa, she would catch at Yolande's arm with nervous fingers, breathing,—

"Oh, let us go home," if haply she saw one approaching whose figure and bearing bore some resemblance to her lover's.

Beneath the Valley Bridge, in the beautiful Lake Ramedale Valley, she would start nervously, as from behind the trees and bushes, tones ever so little like his reached her.

She was always looking for, always expecting him, and ever day by day she grew paler, sadder, thinner, for she had not the high spirit or indomitable pride which had brought Yolande through her many and sore trials.

Even her music which hitherto she had loved, was a burthen to the poor child; true she practised with daily regularity, but the soul had gone from her playing, and Yolande sadly realized that with her it was no longer an inspired art, but a mere mechanical performance.

"She may teach well and successfully," she thought, "but she will never win fame as an artiste."

Her face looked ethereal, glimmering so white from out of the flow of fair hair which Yolande still loved to have dressed in the old childlike way; she was proud of its beauty, proud of her darling, but it went like a knife to her heart to see what wells of sorrow those dark blue eyes had grown, and how sorrowful were the lips which but so short awhile ago had laughed with the merriest.

But honestly she believed she was doing her duty, honestly she doubted Hal's steadfastness, and in this she was encouraged by Bathsheba, who said,—

"They're bad root and branch, them Volsens, curse 'em, and one in the family's quite enough I reckon. Leave missy alone an' she'll come to."

Yolande, listening, pursued her own policy until

as the winter advanced in severity, Winnie's strength broke utterly down.

She fell sick indeed, and it was worse to hear because she never complained.

Medical help was called in, but winter passed, spring began once more to make glad the earth, and still there was no change in her, unless for the worse.

The doctor looked troubled he had become attached to his gentle patient with the loveliness face and winsome ways, and her habitual melancholy profoundly impressed him.

One day, calling Yolande aside, he said,—

"Madam, you will forgive my plain speaking, but I think you have kept something back from me concerning Miss Winnie. If not my skill and knowledge are alike at fault. I have been puzzled a long while to get at the root of the trouble but I think I have found it now—she has something on her mind. Is it not so?"

Yolande hesitated a moment, then she said with an expression of pain,—

"I am afraid I must say yes; it is an unfortunate love affair."

"A love affair in connection with that child seems absurd, may I ask the nature of it? I do so in all pity, not out of idle curiosity Mrs. Yarrow."

"Oh, I feel that, but—but, it is all very sad, and she being so young I hoped it would not long prey upon her mind. The fact is, that I as her lawful guardian refused to sanction any engagement between the two."

"Why?" bluntly, "was the young fellow hopelessly poor, dissolute, or mean?"

"None of those things," Yolande answered, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands; "but it was best so, there were family reasons."

"Family fiddlesticks! My dear Mrs. Yarrow put them aside; they are generally a cloak for feuds and differences. If this young fellow is worthy your niece and able to support her comfortably, set aside your prejudices and let them be happy in their own way. It won't hurt them to wait two or three years so long as each feels certain of the other in the end, and opposition only fans the flame as a wise little woman like you should know. If you are obstinate, well then— and with a significant shrug of the shoulders he paused.

Yolande dashed on him.

"Well then, what would happen? Do not keep back the truth!"

"In all human probability your niece would die of a broken heart; men of science are apt to scoff at such things, but hearts do break, and young lives fade out for want of hope. I have said my say."

Then he left her, and in an agony of pain and dread she sank upon a couch, her hands fast locked, her eyes burning like live coals out of the pallor of her face. What should she do? Wherein lay her duty? Would it be greater kindness to let Winnie go slowly down the narrow way her feet seemed fated to tread, wearing out her heart with fruitless love and longing; or to give her into Hal's embrace, perhaps to suffer daily and hourly torture, and, as she herself had known year in year out.

She fell weeping on her knees praying for help and guidance as she had never done before in all the course of her life. She could not go to Winnie then, her composure was so sorely shaken; and being very exhausted by passion and anxiety she presently dropped asleep upon the couch not waking until Bathsheba announced tea. Then she rose and having so far as she could obliterated all traces of agitation from her face she went back to Winnie. The girl was lying upon a couch drawn close to the window, her little shadowy hands loosely clasped and her eyes gazing with yearning tears over the sullen stretch of sea. Advancing quietly Yolande went behind her and laying light fingers upon her shoulders, said,—

"Of what are you thinking my dear one?"

"Of him and the happy days at Wansley we spent together. Oh! auntie, I do try to obey you in thought even as in deed, but I am not strong enough. Hal is with me always, always, whether I wake or sleep; when I close my eyes I can see him quite distinctly, and sometimes, when I am

very low and faint, I think I hear his voice. But that is just fancy, only fancy, for if I answer, he is silent."

Yolande stood behind her yet, marking the sharp contour of cheek and chin, trying vainly for utter composure, and after the briefest interval Winnie went on dreamily,—

"I should have chosen to live a little longer, had things gone well with me; it is pitiful to die so young; but I am very tired and shall be glad to rest. See, auntie dear, how thin my hands have grown;" and as she held them up to the waning light they were all but transparent.

With a sob Yolande ran to the front of her.

"My dearest dear, why will you try to break my heart. How can you wish to leave me?"

"Forgive me dear auntie, forgive me, I do not want to hurt you, but I have one little thing to ask of you. Will you, before I die, let me see Hal. You know where to find him, and he will come to me—quickly—you must say quickly, because you see the end is so near—Oh! so very much nearer than you think or believe."

Her voice died out then in a low wail, and with a great shock Yolande sprang to her feet. Was she dead? No, no, thank heaven, not that; her heart still faintly fluttered as the other loosed her robes.

"Come back to us Winnie, Winnie!" she moaned, "and I will stand no more between your love and you."

So when, with a long drawn shuddering sigh the child returned to consciousness, Yolande said quietly and impressively,—

"I want you to listen to me dear, calmly, for you are much exhausted by your swoon and the excitement that went before. And I ask you to believe, that, although I have acted harshly, I meant well. Hush! not a word, I thought to combat your love, but it is too strong for me, and may Heaven forbid your blood should fall upon my head. You have only to get well enough for travel and I will take you down to Volsen Towers, there to place you in your lover's arms."

"Auntie, auntie, oh! pray that I may live! And what will you do?"

"Time enough to talk of my plans when yours are settled. Now, have your tea, and I will not broach the subject to you again until to-morrow."

From that day, slowly at first, but presently with almost lightning rapidity Winnie began to mend, until, at the close of a fortnight, she was able to travel to the Towers with Yolande who, until they were nearing their destination, had held strict silence as to herself. Now she said,—

"Winnie, I am going to pain you very much, but in the love which awaits you the pain will soon grow less."

"You are going to Hal and you will convey this note to his brother; he may confide in you or not as he pleases. Tell him I freely forgive him, that never any more shall I lose sight of him, that I love him truly, but nothing can break down that barrier which sunders us. When I leave you safe within his gates, the parting between us is final—unless you or he are in trouble or distress; then, Heaven helping me, I will be with you."

"Oh!" the girl cried, passionately, "I will never leave you on such conditions, where you go I will follow—*auntie—*auntie—**"

"Hush! do I look like a woman to be moved? I have thought it all over and shall not swerve from my decision now. From time to time I will write you—not too often—but so that you may know I am living, loving, and watching over you."

Presently they alighted at the primitive station, and securing the one "dy" the place boasted drove to the Towers.

"Wait for me here," said Yolande to the cabman, and she went into the shrubbery with Winnie.

Then followed the sound of hushed sobbing, of tender loving words—next the elder woman putting the other aside whispered,—

"Give me time to reach the station, then go to the house and ask for the master;" with those words she was gone.

After awhile a trembling figure ascended the steps, laying a slender fearful hand upon the bell.

At that moment the door opened, and Hal stood in the full glow of the light; stretching out her hands Winnie cried,—

"Oh Hal! Hal, I have come back to you;" and then as he caught her close, she fell swooning into his embrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

He carried her into the room where his brother was sitting.

"Hector" he said huskily, "Winnie has come to us; you will give her welcome," and as he placed her upon a couch Volsen brought brandy and such simple remedies, as were at hand, tending her gently as a woman could do.

"She has a lovely face," he said, "I no longer wonder at your infatuation. Poor child! poor child! she has suffered much."

Winnie's swoon was a prolonged one; long before she recovered consciousness Yolande was speeding away to town, her heart torn with the anguish of parting with her darling, and the pride which at least until now "no love could kill" for she could not yield to Hector's reawakened passion and she half doubted his remorse.

Much had Winnie to tell when with her lover's arms about her she contrived to sit erect.

Hector had left them alone together for awhile, until the first transports of their joy should have moderated; now with a haggard face he returned and in his hand was Yolande's letter.

Stooping he kissed the girl's white brow.

"My dear," he said, sadly, "if you can forgive me all the misery I have wrought I shall be grateful. I have your aunt's permission to tell you all the truth—will you hear it now before we discuss your wedding which, by Yolande's desire, is to take place without delay."

"Yes, I will hear now please," said Winnie, simply, "and if you have made us suffer I am sure you are very sorry," and she made room for him beside her.

In a few brief words he made her acquainted with the story of the past, and as he recounted his own sins against Yolande he felt rather than saw that the girl shrank from him.

He made haste to end his narrative. At its close there was an instant's utter almost deathly silence, then having struggled with herself, Winnie put out her hand.

"You have repented long ago—you have been good to Hal and me—when I see auntie really happy I will fully forgive you. Until then, I can only be grateful to you."

"I must be content with that assurance; and now tell me what were your aunt's plans? Have you no conception where she was going. She says (referring to the letter in his hand) 'Winnie is as ignorant as yourself of my intentions,' but surely you must have some notion of what she would do?"

"She would tell me nothing. She only said that from afar she should watch over us, and if trouble befell us she would return to help us if in any way she could."

Hector sighed.

He knew now the indomitable nature of the woman he had wooed, wedded, and wronged; but yet he would not give up hope—to Winnie he said,—

"I have had a room prepared for you, to-night you must rest well because there will be much business to discuss to-morrow. But first who brought you here? You surely did not travel alone in your weak state?"

She told him all. Like a madman he drove to the station, but there he could learn nothing definite—Yolande had carefully arranged her plans and that night an excursion train had passed through the place *en route* for Sheffield, so that in the bustle no one had noticed the slender dark figure flitting along the platform.

Yolande travelled third. There was less chance of discovery so, and she reached her destination safely. Once more she had passed wholly and effectually out of the lives of those who loved her, and only by deepest kindness, greatest tenderness

towards Winnie could Hector recompense her in any way for his shortcomings.

At the close of three weeks it had been arranged that she and Hal should be married, and a dainty bridal gown had already arrived. Hector had promised to make his brother a suitable allowance, and just two days before the wedding he placed a document in his hand, saying,—

"My dear boy this is my gift to you and Winnie. Perhaps you will think I might have done more for you being a rich man, but I am not likely to forget that greed of gold has been my bane, and I would save your life from shipwreck if I could. Winnie has no extravagant tastes, she has been accustomed to comfort not luxury, and so I have purchased for you an annuity of five hundred pounds, to revert to your wife, should you pre-decease her—I think you should manage comfortably on that."

To Hal, who had never had anything of his own, this sum appeared riches, and he tried vainly to thank Hector for his generosity, but words failed him, and the elder man understanding this, said brusquely,—

"There, go away and tell Winnie the news. You may also say I have written to Colonel and Mrs. Saworth inviting them to the wedding. They will come if only for her sake and yours."

So duly the marriage took place, there being only one cloud upon the bride's happiness—the absence of that beloved one who had been all in all to her until Hal came into her life to make it glorious beyond all former hope and conception.

After the ceremony the youthful pair started for a brief trip to Paris, then Hal returned to his duties and Winnie took upon her the pleasant burthens of her new state with a pretty quaint air of dignity infinitely amusing to Hal and to Hector who was their frequent visitor.

From time to time letters reached the young wife from Yolande; always they were tender beyond compare, always they contained a vague hope that one day they should meet again with no cloud between them—sometimes they contained a timid remark as to Hector, and then Winnie would take them to him, knowing well that he found some faint satisfaction in the fact that not only did she not forget him, but that she still thought of him with a wifely love and longing.

Winnie had been married fifteen months and her first baby was born before she began to notice a change in Hector; at first it was very slight and intangible, but it grew with each day; she saw too he was less lavish in his expenditure and at first feared he was relapsing into miserliness and felt sore at heart, for let that meaneast of vices once hold him in thrall, then farewell to any future joy for the absent Yolande.

At last she ventured to speak on the subject to Hal, and his grave face told her there was something radically wrong, he answered her with some hesitation and under promise of secrecy.

"The fact is, little darling, he has been speculating largely and unluckily, he bought a number of shares in the Pagoda at ten pounds a share; he cannot now dispose of them for tenpence; and one or two other speculations have been even more unfortunate."

"But why, if he is a rich man, does he need to add gold to gold?"

"It is his idea that his life will be much shorter than Yolande's, and he wishes to leave her a wealthy woman—by way of atonement. Then again he has other troubles, this prolonged strike is crippling him sorely, neither men nor masters will give in, and what will be the end Heaven only knows. This one thing is certain, Hector is trying to let the Towers, giving out that he has no use for so large a house, but in reality he does not feel himself in a position to maintain such an establishment. So when he comes again, Winnie, you must be extra nice."

"I will try," she answered, so cheerfully that he was surprised and a trifle hurt; she was quick to read every change on his speaking ace, and hastened to add,—

"Don't think me heartless. I am not; but if trouble befalls him, there will be joy too. Auntie Yolande will be his own wife again."

"But as a ruined man he would never seek her, or thrust himself upon her."

"But she would find him, just to comfort him in his affliction; but Hal, my husband, after fifteen months of wedded life you do not understand woman's nature, least of all, auntie's."

"Then I have been but a very dull scholar," he cried, kissing her with all the passion of their early love. "I am inclined to say with Otway,—

"Oh! woman, lovely woman! Nature made thee
To temper man; we had been brutes without you!"

"Why, Hal," she interrupted, "what is this? The soldier turned poet! Then, indeed, has marriage done something for you."

Long before it was expected or even guessed, Hector Volsen stood on the brink of ruin; everything had gone against him, everything for which he had sold himself and sacrificed Yolande was swept away; and on a certain day it became known to the world that of all his colossal fortune only enough remained to satisfy his creditors.

Then his strength and courage alike failed him, face to face he stood with ruin, broken down, looking with desperate eyes upon the havoc time had wrought for him.

How could he begin life again; he felt so old and worn, so buffeted and battered by the storms through which he had passed!

And through all his anguish and despair he had but one grain of comfort. Hal and Winnie would not suffer through his folly and rash speculations—they at least were safe—thank Heaven for that.

Even as with bowed head he brooded upon that thought, the door quietly opened and the swift rush of delicate skirts told him that the girl was near.

In an instant she was kneeling beside him.

"Hector, poor dear Hector, why did you not send for us—it happened three days ago, and yet all the world knew before we did. I want to tell you how grieved we are, but I am so foolish. Hal, dear, you must speak for both, tell him what we propose."

As hand clasped hand, the elder brother met the younger's regard with a satisfied smile.

"I knew you would not fail me, lad, and it has been my one comfort to feel that my ruin does not involve yours."

"It was of that we came to speak," Hal said, somewhat uncertainly. "You know, dear old boy, but for your generosity we could not have married for a long, long while; now I want you to take back your gift with the exception of a hundred a year. Winnie thinks we can manage with that, and I shall sell out, and find something else to do."

"No, no, no," broke in Hector, impetuously, "what I give I give; I will not touch one penny of your little fortune; I will only ask you to grant me a corner in your home until I have found something to do;" and he sank back exhausted in his chair, for all these weeks and months of anxiety had cruelly tried him.

Still he was strong enough to resist their united entreaties, and seeing that they troubled him beyond measure, Winnie said gently,—

"Well, we have plenty of time in which to discuss these matters; but first you must come home with me and let me nurse you well again."

Once more the door had noiselessly opened; this time it was a heavily veiled woman who stood upon the threshold, halting a moment, with her hands clasped over her heart.

Winnie was first to see her, and with a violent start would have cried out; but a signal from the other stayed her.

Slowly advancing she spoke but two words, and in speaking them threw back her veil,—

"Hector!—husband!"

He turned at sound of her voice, and staggering to his feet, groaned out—

"You—Yolande—you! I deserve you should come to look at my fall and triumph in it;" and fell back almost senseless in his chair.

Swifter than lightning she approached, and as his head fell forward, wound her arms about his neck, drew his face down upon her breast.

"Not to triumph, but to share in it," she

whispered, "I have been hard and unforgiving, but your trouble has melted my heart, and I can freely say thank Heaven for the loss which makes you mine again. Oh, my husband, forgetting all the past, let us begin life together anew—"

"But," he interrupted, not daring to grasp the good things offered him, "I am utterly ruined. I can call nothing in the world my own."

"Except, perhaps your wife; and whilst I have health and strength I will work for you gladly; if I have something to forgive, I have still more for which to atone. Hector, Hector, I have come to my senses at last. Will you take me back again?"

She was humble where she might have been proud; she pleaded where she might have commanded, being like all such natures generous to a fault, pitiful to the fallen or the grieving.

With a deep sob he bowed his face upon the beauty of her hair. "Yolande—my wife, my darling," and as they clung shaken and weeping together, Winnie and Hal escaped.

Great happiness came to them, never any more to take wings to itself; and with a glad heart Yolande laboured for her husband until he found fresh work to do; and although he never attained to wealth, he won a modest competence, so that the future with its increasing years held no fear for them.

And when to crown their joy one son was born to Yolande, she envied no living woman.

Hal rose rapidly, and in his regiment there is no more popular man than he; whilst everybody votes "little Mrs. Rounswell" the prettiest, nicest, and kindest of women.

[THE END.]

THE Japanese tattooers not only picture dragons and flowers and muscums on the bodies of their patrons, but to meet the artistic demands of Europeans they now produce in colours an exact photograph of any cherished friend whose image the tattooed person may desire to have constantly with him.

In China the beggars are organised into companies, each having its own district, and allowing allegiance and paying tribute to a "King of the Beggars," who lives in regal splendour. Every beggar has his own beat, beyond which he is not allowed, under penalty of severe punishment, to go. He is permitted to visit each house on his beat once, and but once, every day, and on making his appearance at the door, if his appeal for charity be not at once attended to, he may shout, sing, ring a bell, or make any other noise he pleases until he has received one "cash," the smallest copper coin in use, after which he must move on. Some merchants, to save time and trouble, have a frame hung in front of their houses, with as many nails driven into it as there are beggars in the district. Every morning a servant hangs a "cash" on each nail, and each beggar comes in turn, takes one coin, and moves on.

FLYING FOXES AND BATS.—The flying foxes are relished as food by the inhabitants of the countries where they are found, and certainly a creature which lives on fruit ought to be good eating. Their heads are wonderfully like that of a miniature fox, and their large eyes suggest that they find their way by sight, of which sense the small insectivorous bats would seem to be almost independent, as blinded specimens, in the experiments of Spallanzani, proved to be able to avoid obstacles in their flight as easily as those which could see. This power bats owe to their highly developed sense of touch, the large sensitive naked wings enabling them to perceive an object before they touch it, probably by the difference in the resistance of the air. And the huge ears and complicated nose appendages found in so many insectivorous species also subserve the purpose of guidance, though they certainly do not add to the animal's appearance, the facial aspect of some bats being past description hideous, while they are just as offensive to the nose as to the eye.

HIS TRUE WORTH.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

THE first impulse of Miss Arabella Trott, on hearing all that her nephew Richard Falkland had to tell her, when he and Hildegarde came in from the shore, was to execute a species of "Ta-ra-ra-Boom-de-ay" dance, for very joy, all over the Penarthur hotel!

"Things have indeed taken a marvellous turn for the better," cried Aunt Bella. "What will happen next, I wonder!"

And so, of course, Richard did not take his leave of that southern Cornish village on the same evening of his arrival there, but remained with Aunt Bella and Hildegarde until the following day—a golden, halcyon time for him, which was as a foretaste of Paradise itself.

And before departing from Penarthur for London and his mother's cottage in Cheshire, Richard, with the sweet and gracious aid which Hildegarde volunteered, concocted a long explanatory letter to that friend of his in Calcutta, retracting every one of those eager, glowing, jubilant words which he had penned with such emotions of immeasurable gratitude and hope in the epistle that was already on its way out to India—that epistle which should have heralded his own advent there.

That well-intentioned friend of his father's, however, would never see Richard now.

His dream of greatness was ended. Fame of a different kind, nevertheless, might fall to his lot by-and-by; for the world is full of chances for the steadfast and the brave.

Yet there was still one thing—one bitter drop of Marah, as it were, in his overflowing cup of happiness—which troubled exceedingly the soul of Richard Falkland; and that was the thought, the fact, of Hildegarde's wealth; the money which had been the root of so much evil indeed, that had caused so many heartaches and tears.

"If I could have but one more wish gratified," he said to Aunt Bella, on that night of his sojourn at Penarthur—and he spoke so earnestly, so heart-feltly, that his bright brown eyes became dim and moist—"it would be that she might wake up to-morrow morning, and find herself just as poor as I am."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed practical Miss Arabella. "Why, what would you both do then, pray?"

"I know, at least, what I should do," returned Richard sturdily. "Body and brain alike would I work until I had won for her a fortune."

"And then having won it, dear lad?" questioned Aunt Bella more generously.

"I would lay it at her feet," he answered, simply.

In the dingy, oak-panelled old drawing-room at the Moat House sat George Walmer all alone.

Her chair—an ancient chintz-covered one, with high arms to it—was placed by an open window, and George's fair head was resting back against the faded cushions. Her eyes were turned listlessly towards the wild old garden outside.

She was dressed in mourning, deep yet simple, the melancholy sombreness of the crape gown contrasting forcibly with the delicate tint of her old young face.

The flecking afternoon sunlight just touched her here and there; the heavy creeper-leaves and tall garden-lilies swayed slowly to and fro in the breeze by the open window.

George was sole mistress of the Moat House now; there was no one in the world to dispute her right to the inheritance.

Her days would probably end in the dull old house where her life as a child of five had begun.

She was richer by far than she had ever dreamed of being—richer, so to say, in a worldly and practical sense—so she had but to live and

to be patient, as she often told herself with gentle resignation.

Ughtred St. Austell himself had had nothing to bequeath; for all that he left behind him on earth, all save the luckless old home itself, had gone straightway to those whose claim to it was indubitable—his creditors—to whom his death had done justice at last.

George, however, was safe. Lady St. Austell, who loved her, had taken care that her interests should suffer in no wise.

Yes, she was safe—would want for nothing so long as she lived—but, dear Heaven! how lonely and alone.

The afternoon was warm and still and drowsy; purblind old Pratt, pottering about the shrubberies as usual with rake and broom, said there was "thunder about somewhere."

George's eyes closed involuntarily, anyhow; and presently she fell into a doze, dreaming perhaps of the past and the love that was lost to her for ever.

Later she awoke with a great start, to find Hildegard Ray kneeling there by her side, and the arms of Hildegard encircling her waist.

"You! Is it really you, Hildegard?" cried the young girl, gladly, as soon as her eyes were open and her brain was clear.

"Yes, George—it is I, and no one else. Darling, I have come to comfort you!"

And then in the next instant, George Walmer was on Hildegard's bosom, and the burden of her terrible loneliness was in a measure lifted from her soul.

It was some little while before they were both quite calm, and were seated close to each other, side by side, with the warm garden air, laden with the odour of lilies and nighonette commingled, breathing in upon them.

They had much to speak of that belonged to the past—of things and remembrances which, after this afternoon, should never again be recalled between them.

"I never dreamed that you were at Court-gardens," George said, "although, indeed, I have been wishing, every day since you wrote to me from Penarthur, that you would hasten your return to Drummerfield."

"Aunt Bella and I came back only last night," Hildegard explained. "Of course, we were expected at home, darling; but I thought that I should like to give you a little surprise. And it is a pleasant one, too, I hope, George!"

"Yes—oh, yes! For, Hildegard, I have wanted you greatly. I have not a soul in the world to care for me now, except you. I—I feel so terribly alone sometimes; and the nights are dreadful. Your love and your friendship, in the future, will in truth be everything to me now."

"Have we not always been friends, dear?"

"You see—you see it is such an age since we last met," George replied, a trifle hurriedly and evasively "that it seems, somehow, as if there had been a—break in—in our—"

"Say no more, darling. I understand," Hildegard stopped her generously.

And then they spoke together of Lady St. Austell and of her last days on earth; and George, with grateful tears alike in eyes and voice, related to Hildegard how good and kind in every direction, in every conceivable way, the Drummerfield folk had shown themselves towards her, during those dreadful, dreadful days between the death and the burial.

"And, Hildegard," she added earnestly, "before the dear mother died, she bade me tell you as a last message from her, that—that it was, in a way, all her fault—the cruel trouble and sorrow, I mean—that it all happened to you, dear, solely through her, because in her soul she coveted secretly and wanted—wanted your money, Hildegard—not for herself, of course, but for—but for— Oh, you know all that I would say, do you not?" George broke off pitifully. "She hoped that you would forgive her, Hildegard. She said so almost at the last."

"If there was anything to forgive, it is already forgiven—freely and absolutely," Hildegard answered gently; and bowed her head.

But there was something that George Walmer could bring herself to speak of to no living soul—not even to Hildegard—and that was the sacred mystery of the twilight evening when Lady St. Austell had laid down the cross and the burthen of life.

The young girl had her own thoughts, her own sweet, secret convictions, concerning that never-to-be-forgotten night; and whatever the nature of them might be, she could bare them to no mortal eye, but would keep them always—as she had kept them hitherto—locked away, jealously and sensitively, within her inmost heart.

The secret was shared, as it were, between herself and Heaven alone. It had nothing whatever to do with earth and mundane things.

The clustering leaves about the heavy old mullioned casement stirred and rustled faintly in the languid west wind; the long pale grasses around the gnarled trunks of the elms nodded and shivered and swayed in the deep garden-shade.

On the huge, projecting house-porch the sparrows chirped pertly as they sat and preened themselves in the sunlight; and down in the thickest and bookiest depths of the green garden-dells the black-birds were teaching their callow broods to fly.

George Walmer, sitting there with Hildegard's hand clasped tenderly within her own, and looking out upon the dark green loveliness of the dawning summer, felt somehow, in spite of herself, that in life there is always hope, and balm eventually for every grief.

Time must bring solace, sooner or later, no matter how keen the past sorrow may have been.

The night and its shadows were passing away; and George knew, and was thankful to know, that they would never come again—never again so darkly, at any rate, never again!

"Hildegard," she said presently, "do you know that there is one question I—I should so much like to ask you. May I?"

Her manner was very timid; the expression on the sweet fair face was almost a frightened one, Hildegard saw.

"A question, George? What is it, darling? I will answer it if I can."

"Oh, Hildegard—do not think me hard or cruel or—or anything. But—how—how did you ever discover that—that—"

"Well, dear, I am listening!"

"That Ughtred and I—loved each other."

She twined her little white hands together nervously, and averted her troubled face.

"He told me," she continued more bravely, "before he went away, that you had found it out; but neither of us could imagine how; because, Hildegard, I thought that, before you, in your presence always, I had guarded my secret so well."

"Yes, George, you guarded your secret only too well, dear," Hildegard answered sadly, and perhaps with a shade of bitterness that was surely justifiable.

"I could scarcely have done that, after all," George declared almost wildly, "or the truth would never have been known."

Then Hildegard recalled to her the evening of the ball at Court-gardens, and told the girl, quietly and dispassionately, the story of that eventful night—of all that she, Hildegard, had listened to, and overheard, when searching for the lost programme amongst the palms and flowers of the conservatory.

"It was wrong, blameworthy, of course, to play so ignoble a part," she said; "but I think you can hardly blame me, George; and certainly I do not blame myself—now. The scales fell mercifully from my eyes that night, and I knew at last that he loved you then—ay, and that you loved him also, dear. Never shall I forget the anguish of that hour—I believe it was worse than death. But it is all past and over now. Do not let us speak of it ever again."

George laid her head wearily upon the other's shoulder.

She murmured brokenly,—

"Then I myself have had much to do with the evil that came to pass, you see! Indeed, it is

chiefly through me, it seems, that you have been made so terribly unhappy. Therefore, Hildegard, I also must beg your forgiveness; for I sinned deeply against you, albeit I never meant to, I robbed you unintentionally of—"

"Hush, for Heaven's sake, dear child!" Hildegard interrupted, with an irrepressible shudder of pain. "You robbed me of nothing. He never loved me. Let us bury the past, and keep it down in its grave. For me, notwithstanding, its trial and sorrow were all for the best, and I ought not to murmur or complain. My eyes, George, were opened in time, so that I was saved."

"And can you think kindly of him still?" the young girl persisted dreamily, her yellow head, soft as a canary's, still resting on Hildegard's shoulder. "Or possibly you have learned to loathe his memory? The latter would be only natural, I fear," whispered George, with a long-drawn sigh.

Then Hildegard Ray, for the first time that afternoon, spoke with real passion and feeling.

"Deeply as he wronged me," she cried, with a transient earnestness so terrible that George raised her head involuntarily, shrinking a little at the same time from the beautiful woman at her side—"I cannot yet hate him, even if I would. Better indeed were it for me, if I could. Sometimes I find myself praying that hate may come quickly and kill outright the lingering tenderness for his memory that I cannot banish wholly from my heart. Yes, he wronged me deeply, and most cruelly—but, George, I had my revenge; a just revenge—I proved him; and proved him worthless—base, mercenary, absolutely worthless. Still, I have forgiven him, and I would that I could forget."

"Ah, do not speak so harshly of him," George entreated, turning again to Hildegard. "I do not like to hear it. To me his memory is exceedingly dear—it must ever be so—in spite of his sins, I shall cherish it always. He was so good to me; always so good and kind. And—and now that he is gone for ever, I care only to remember his kindness—nothing more."

"He wronged us both!" said Hildegard, gloomily.

"Never me," returned George, gently and unselfishly as ever. "You must not think that, please."

"He marred my life," said Hildegard passionately again, her bosom heaving in stormy resentment at the recollection of the treachery of Ughtred St. Austell. "He might have made your life bright and happy, at least, and yet he did not, would not. He—"

"Is dead," put in George very quietly, upturning wet, beseeching eyes to the pale, set profile of Hildegard Ray.

And Hildegard, thus reproved, answered with humility.

"Darling, you are right. Do not look so mournful, George; I have indeed forgiven him, as I trust that future pardon will be granted unto me. Oh, my little friend," cried Hildegard, "what a bitter mistake has been this one past year!"

And George Walmer, with bent head and saddened, dreamful eyes, murmured absently,—

"Yes, Hildegard, a mistake from beginning to end."

"And now," Hildegard Ray said, steadily, "and now, darling, I have some news to impart."

She hesitated then for a moment or two, and silence reigned in the room; but Hildegard broke it and went on bravely,—

"Yes, George, it will be great news for you, I am sure; and when you have heard what it is, then, dear, you will know of a surety that I must have forgiven the past—forgiven it wholly and freely. You will be astonished, but you must remember at the same time that there is much to tell, much to explain in the matter. Could you—could you not guess my news, George dear?" she continued, wistfully, slipping from her seat to the old threadbare carpet that covered the oaken floor of the Moat House drawing-room, and winding her arms around the girl's waist—just as George had found them when she awoke by the open window—"for, after all, it is

nothing very wonderful, nothing very extraordinary!"

The song of the woodland birds came in, with the whispering and the sighing of the heavy, languid leaves. The afternoon had waned, and evening was drawing near; the ancient wild garden was growing darker every minute.

Georgie, in the sunset light, with the tremulous shadows of the creeper-leaves upon her hair, looked down wonderingly upon the beautiful woman sitting there at her feet, and said in her gentle, quiet way,—

"Oh, Hildegarde, indeed I could never guess!"

"Could you not? Then I must tell you. Well, Georgie—Georgie—"

"Yes, Hildegarde!"

"I am engaged to be married."

In the stillness which followed on those six words, a robin flew past the window, seeking its nest in the ivy; a fly buzzed noisily on the warm pane; and the tall white and amber lilies, with their heads above the window-sill, shivered and swayed again as the breeze crept through them.

The wound could not then have been so very deep, after all—at least, it would seem so—the young girl was thinking with a touch of bitterness, since solace and consolation had come so soon in the form of another love—another lover!

A feeling of sore contempt against Hildegarde rose up suddenly in the breast of Georgie Walmer; and then she as quickly remembered that perhaps she was judging hastily and unreasonably, and was duly penitent in the next moment.

It was not as if the dead man's memory was a memory to be exactly revered by Hildegarde Ray—Georgie acknowledged the fact to herself, humbly enough—for in his lifetime he had treated the woman who loved him in the most heartless and perfidious fashion, had wrought his best to spoil her life, and to turn her affection into gall and hatred.

The recollection of her wrongs was insufferable to Hildegarde, as the girl was aware; and surely, if she was anxious to bury the past, and to keep it down in its grave, as she herself had phrased it, she could not do better than it appeared she had already done, nor have chosen a swifter and safer road to tranquillity of mind and complete oblivion.

No, it was scarcely just to be angry with Hildegarde, Georgie decided at last; and so, the surprise of the moment overcome, she said, with tender sympathy,—

"Ah, no—I should never have guessed that!" adding, "And do you love him very dearly, Hildegarde, this new lover, I mean?"

"You must know that he is not altogether what you call a new lover, Georgie dearest," Hildegarde replied, her voice sorrowful and her smile grave; "and—and I am sorry to say that I do not love him, Georgie."

"Not love him!" exclaimed the girl, yet further amazed. "Oh, Hildegarde, surely that is very strange! May I know his name?" she added, gently.

And Hildegarde, still resting there on the well-worn carpet at Georgie Walmer's feet, lifted her calm, truthful eyes, and answered,—

"His name is Richard Falkland."

It was late when Hildegarde's carriage drove away from the Moat House; nearly half-past seven o'clock in fact.

But Miss Ray did not leave the gloomy old house unaccompanied, as she had gone thither in the afternoon.

Georgie, docile and unresisting, was carried off in triumph, to sojourn for an indefinite period at the brighter home of her friend.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE home-coming to Courtgardens of Hildegarde Ray was barely a week old, when the old people and the gossip in the village of Drummerfield and neighbourhood roundabout began to talk once more of Richard.

Aged Nancy Brown, one evening, creeping out

all by herself for "a gasp o' air," as she called it, in the twilight, and picking up a dry stick here and there as she crawled along, after the thrifty fashion of cottage dames, who have sulky black kettles to coax into boiling-humour at home, had seen him—Mr. Richard Falkland—so old Nancy declared, in the vicinity of Miss Ray's house.

In fact, according to the old stick-gathering dame, Dick was seen to turn in at the lodges and march straightway up the chestnut avenue, now at its loveliest, with creamy, fragrant tassels and sheeny satin leaves.

"But I warn't nigh enough to spake to 'un," said Nancy, "or I should ha' had a word wif the lad, ye may take yer oath o' that." And though her friends and neighbours pooh-poohed her finely when she carried her tale and her sticks home with her—Nancy retaliating spiritedly with—"Why, drat ye all, ain't I to believe my own eyes then?" her statement was nevertheless corroborated on the very next day by Mrs. Brittle, the Courtgardens housekeeper herself; who, meeting Mrs. Hobson in the village High-street, informed that lady that Mr. Richard Falkland had indeed been to call upon her mistress and Miss Trott; and, furthermore, that he, having arrived late at the house, had passed the night at Courtgardens. Mrs. Hobson was astounded, of course.

Oh yes, Mrs. Brittle proceeded to explain, in answer to Mrs. Hobson's breathless eager questioning, Mr. Falkland was gone again now, but she thought that he might be returning to Courtgardens before long. Miss Arabella Trott seemed to hint as much after his departure, though as yet she had given out nothing for certain.

"He certainly ought to have come to see me," had exclaimed Mrs. Hobson indignantly—"comfortable as I always made him. He said so himself. Why, Mrs. Brittle, I darned his socks for him every week of his life; his own mother herself couldn't well have looked after him better!"

So the days went by, and little by little, as such things will and ever do, the actual truth of the case leaked out and got abroad throughout the whole neighbourhood.

Then, as was only to be expected, all the tongues in the place, high and low, both in and round about Drummerfield especially, went wagging with a will over the astonishing rumour that Richard Falkland was engaged to marry the rich Miss Ray—Hildegarde Ray, of Courtgardens, with her fifty thousand a year!

Drummerfield, once more, was simply convulsed—shaken to its core from end to end.

"What a lucky youngster of a chap he be, to be sure," said his humble village friends—poor mothers, these, chiefly, who had always admired and loved him for his unfeeling kindness to themselves and their little ones in times of sickness and distress; "and he de-erves the good-fortune that have come to him, that he do! Why, there ain't a nicer-spoken young fella' a-livin', I don't care where ye look for and finds the next. Say what ye will, he's a precious sight superior to that 'other she took up with, and chucked overboard and quarrelled with last autumn. Why, drat it, he couldn't hold a candle to this 'un," said they staunchly, alluding disparagingly to Lord St. Austell, who, during his chequered and wandering lifetime, had been little known or cared for in Drummerfield, and consequently little mourned at his death—"although he had that precious handle to his name, and was that proud and 'aughty, the Queen herself wasn't good enough for him, as the saying is!"

As for the great and influential ones whom Hildegarde knew, and who professed such warm and friendly regard for her always, they went about saying,—

"What in the world can the woman be thinking of—she's no girl, you know—to throw herself away like that! Why, when all's said and done, he is nothing on earth but a common apothecary just a few degrees or so removed, I suppose, from an ordinary chemist! And she with her fifty thousand a year! What a shocking come down"—speaking very slowly, and with awful solemnity—"after Ughtred St. Austell!"

But, by-and-by—later on—the hitherto

unknown and unsuspected true history of Ughtred St. Austell's faithlessness, treachery, and subsequent discomfiture, likewise leaked out by degrees and got abroad in the county; and then, after that, there was, perhaps, not quite so much talk going about concerning "a shocking come-down" in connection with this second engagement.

And later on, too, the busy-bodies amongst them somehow managed to ferret out the true and only reason of poor Dick's extraordinary conduct, when he deserted his post in the Hobson household, without so much as a warning word to anyone belonging to it, on that momentous night of the Courtgardens ball.

"And only to think, now, that he should have loved her all along," Mrs. Hobson exclaimed to the Vicar's wife, "and never said a word about it—not even to me! Upon my life, it is really past belief! But there"—with a sigh of resignation to all earthly conundrums—"nothing astonishes me now a days, and nothing ever will again."

Which was scarcely true, seeing that the most insignificant event out of the common run was more than sufficient to set Drummerfield in a ferment—the doctor's wife included.

So everything became known and proclaimed from the house-tops at last, and tantalising mysteries were cleared up satisfactorily.

Gradually Richard Falkland was looked upon less and less coldly by those who had at first considered it "derogatory" and "caste-losing" in Hildegarde Ray to accept as her future husband Dr. Hobson's young ex-assistant.

His cheerfulness and sweet temper, however, won over to his side many friends, beyond a doubt; but then, after all, it was neither good policy nor good taste to quarrel with a man who had so miraculously obtained the favour of a beautiful woman—a beautiful woman worth fifty thousand a year.

Therefore it came about that many lips took to smiling very kindly and sweetly on Richard as the days went by—these very lips which, at first, had been indiscreet enough to curl with an almost open disdain.

"We must make the best of a bad bargain," said the "dear friends" of Hildegarde one to the other. And shrugged their shoulders as they said it.

At the end of the year Hildegarde was married to her boyish lover; the Bishop of Kilchester, assisted by the Vicar of Drummerfield, performing the ceremony, and the whole neighbourhood turning out to see the wedding, as a matter of course.

"I think it is needless to tell you that I can never love again as I once loved the dead. All that I had in my heart to give, that I freely gave to him. It can never be my own again, as it were, to bestow upon another."

Thus had she spoken to him on the sea shore at Penarthur; and yet in the face of everything, Richard was marvellously content. The future was ahead of them; and he would make her love him in time.

The marriage-service concluded, and the smart bridal-breakfast at Courtgardens at an end likewise, they started, with rice and satin slippers flying and tumbling all about the travelling-carriage, for the honeymoon.

Years have rolled onward.

Seasons have come and gone. In Drummerfield have taken place the usual changes that "Time the Whirligig," must ever bring to pass.

There have been births, marriages, and deaths,—indeed no lack of them—as elsewhere.

Yet unchanged at the Moat House, high up on the wooded hill side, lives a quiet, sweet-faced, and most gentle lady whom they call the good angel of the village.

In truth, she does great good everywhere, and is beloved by everyone.

Her name is Georgie Walmer, and it is known that she will never marry. She prefers to live alone, she says, and is happy in her solitude.

Not even when the autumn winds go shrieking and howling round the walls of the desolate mansion—which is all so much too big for her comfort—rattling the window-frames with their



"I WARN'T NIGH ENOUGH TO SPEAK TO 'UN," SAID NANCY, SPEAKING OF RICHARD FALKLAND.

time-worn fastenings, jarring the heavy doors, and making the worm-eaten oaken boards creak and crack aloud, will she admit that she is ever dull.

She loves the ghostly, decaying old house, and will not forsake it.

She minds not the bats and the owls, nor the rats and the croaking frogs in the sluggish reedy moat.

She fears not the rodents behind the mouldy wainscoting, when they scratch and rush and squeak shrilly at midnight, scaring the purblind old servants half out of their wits.

For her the old place is full of secret memories, tender and sweet and sad. She has prayed for patience and resignation to her lot, and Heaven has granted her both.

Dr. Hobson and his energetic spouse still live and flourish at the substantial house in Drummerfield High-street. They often speak wistfully of Richard Falkland—the old Richard Falkland of the long ago, not the wealthy country gentleman of to-day.

Dr. and Mrs. Hobson go occasionally to Courtgardens, it is true—once or twice a-year, perhaps, to dine; scarcely oftener.

"The place is much too grand for us," Mrs. Hobson is wont to say regretfully. "And he is not the Richard we used to know. I wonder if he ever thinks of the days when I used to darn his socks for him, full of holes as they were from the wash!"

And at Courtgardens there is peace. For Hildegard has long since learned to love her husband as he deserves to be loved by her; albeit the deep and even affection which she feels for him is an emotion altogether different from that blind, unreasoning, undisciplined devotion which she gave so prodigally to Ughtred St. Austell.

She can never love again as she loved in the dead past, and Richard knows it as well as she; but the knowledge troubles him not one whit—because she so often assures him that he alone, now, is all the world to her and more.

He believes her, and is satisfied. For he knows that the love which he has won at last is all the deeper and all the better for lacking the fever, the passion, and the unrest, of those old dead days that are gone for ever.

Miss Arabella Trott is no longer at Courtgardens; she lives with Richard's mother in Cheabire. They had begged her to remain with them always; but no amount of loving persuasion would induce her to alter her decision.

"What!" had exclaimed Aunt Bella, briskly, "stop here with you? Not I, my dears. I should be to you no better than a veritable mother-in-law; and that sort of thing has never yet answered, and never will. No," said the little old lady, firmly—"I must go." And she went.

The most constant visitor and guest at Courtgardens is Georgie Walmer—Miss Walmer of the Moat House, as she is now habitually termed in Drummerfield.

She is adored by the children—Richard, Hildegard, and the little shy-faced, flaxen-haired Georgie, her own godchild.

Richard Falkland, the magistrate and country gentleman, has much to occupy his time, for his position in the county is a high one. But he likes work for its own sake, and works hard. Rich and poor equally look up to him, talk of his worth and integrity, and say that he is a rising man.

Hildegard herself, woman-like ambitious for the man she loves, is dreaming of a seat in Parliament for him; and Richard tells her that in a year or two her hopes shall not be disappointed. They rarely speak of Ughtred St. Austell. One day, however, when Hildegard mentioned his name, Richard pretended to be angry and jealous. Hildegard looked troubled.

"Oh, Richard—don't!" she said, earnestly. And, speaking, she raised her hand and swept back from her white temple the still dark and luxuriant hair, and then showed him a faint pink scar lined there on the delicate skin. "Dick, my dear, dear husband, hush! This, see you, and

naught else in life, is all that I have left to remind me of Ughtred St. Austell!"

Thus she whispered to him, and he too then became grave; though his bright brown eyes flashed out their strong, tender love.

He gathered her to his breast, wound his arms around her, pressed his tanned cheek again and again to the beautiful upturned face on his heart—but whispered nothing back.

Never a word could he speak indeed; for his heart was too full.

[THE END.]

THE costliest meal ever served, as far as history shows, was a supper given by Adelin Verus, one of the most lavish of the latter day Roman aristocrats. The supper was only intended for a dozen persons, yet its cost was six thousand sestertertia, which would amount to forty-eight thousand pounds in English money. The celebrated feast given by Vitellius, a Roman emperor of those degenerate days to his brother Lucius, consisted of two thousand different dishes of fish and seven thousand different fowls, beside other courses in proportion. Vitellius, fortunately for the world, did not reign very long; otherwise the game preserves of Libya, Spain and Britain would have been completely exhausted.

ANYONE who wishes to see the ghost of a flower has only to make a very simple experiment. Let him go up to a cluster of blossoms and look very intently for several minutes at one side of it. Then very suddenly he must turn his gaze upon the other side of the same cluster. He will at once distinctly see a faint and delicate circle of coloured light around this second half of the cluster. The light is always in the hue which is "complementary" to that of the flower. The spectre of the scarlet poppy is of a greenish white. The ghost of the primrose is purple. The ghost of the blue fringed gentian is of a pale gold tint. In these circles of colour the shapes of the flower's petals are always faintly but clearly seen.



"OH! DON'T SAY THERE'S ANYTHING WRONG WITH MY FATHER, DR. HARLEY," CRIED PERCY, ANXIOUSLY.

UNDER A CLOUD.

—10:—

CHAPTER X.

PERCY FELLOWES was not the sort of man to put off any duty because it happened to be irksome. After a few days, inaction, caused mainly by Dr. Harley's absence in London, he reminded his father of his reluctant promise to see the physician.

Sir George made a wry face.

"If you insist on it I suppose I must," he said, ruefully; "but it would be just as well to wait a little; after such a haul as four hundred pounds, one of those phantom cheques can't appear for a good while."

"I want to do something before there is another," said Percy, gravely; "haven't you noticed, sir, how the amount steadily increases. The first was drawn for twenty pounds, the last for four hundred. The forger must have been pretty confident when he ventured on such a large sum."

Sir George groaned.

"I tell you it's not forgery. Do you think I can't tell my own writing; but I suppose you must have your own way, Percy. Only, remember, I'm not mad," the poor old man went on pitifully; "I'm as sane as you or Barbara."

Percy sighed as he caught the end of the sentence. He was the only one of the family really anxious about his sister, the only one to see that her strange "fancies," her fits of nervous depression, might be caused by some malady of the brain.

Lady Fellowes always ascribed the terrible change in her daughter to her disappointment in love.

The mother was one of those women who, perfectly happy in their own married life, always look with a kind of pity upon girls who remain single; to Lady Fellowes it was a foregone conclusion that if a woman's love affairs did not go right she

either married some one she did not care for out of pique, or took up a hobby.

Barbara had done the last; her hobby being good works. All her spare time when she was free from her family's claims was spent on errands of mercy.

She was as good to the High Cliff poor as a parish nurse, a district visitor, and a Bible woman all rolled into one.

Personally, Lady Fellowes would have preferred to see Barbara married; but after the affair with Robert Lang she had given up all hopes of that. If only her daughter was tolerably cheerful she let her go her own way.

Percy's feeling about Barbara was very different. He knew that her love for Lang had long since turned into an abject fear—a pitiful fear. That being so, now the black sheep was in the safe-keeping of a colonial prison, Percy argued Barbara should have recovered her spirits, but instead she grew more and more depressed, and when not engaged in her charities she seemed as one far removed from all that went on around her.

They often spoke to her without her hearing, and when they roused her she always turned to them with a startled troubled face as though her spirit had suddenly been called back from somewhere very far off.

"As sane as Barbara!" seemed to Percy a very mild way of emphasising his father's sanity, for the young man had grievous fears that the shock she had gone through at the exposure of Lang's perfidy had really shaken his sister's reason.

His heart ached for the troubles looming over his family, when one afternoon he walked down High Cliff village, and knocked at the bright green door, which had a brass plate inscribed James Harley, M.D.

He chose the hour when most of the cottagers would be at tea, for he did not want the news of his visit to the doctor noised abroad.

The old man who admitted him could be trusted not to gossip. He and his wife had

been in Dr. Harley's service for over twenty years, and knew how to hold their tongues.

The physician was sitting at tea. He started up when he saw his visitor, for Percy was shown at his own request into the pleasant study instead of the consulting-room.

"Nothing wrong at the Towers, I hope?"

"There's a great deal wrong, Dr. Harley, I'm afraid," said Percy, sitting down. "I want to tell you a long story; but if you would give me a cup of tea, and try to make my visit seem a social one, I shall be grateful."

Dr. Harley rang the bell for another cup, sent a message to Mrs. Lewis for more strawberries and cream, and showed himself the soul of hospitality.

He was a man of nearly fifty, and the children at the Towers had been his first patients of consequence when he came to High Cliff. He had brought Barbara and Percy through all their juvenile troubles. People said to his devoted care Barbara owed her life, in the terrible illness which followed Robert Lang's flight. He was a firm friend of the whole family and as true as steel.

"I need not go out till six o'clock," he said before Lewis, who was removing the tea tray, "and if you'll wait I can drive you home. It's a deal too hot for you to walk, you seem done up now."

It was barely five, for Dr. Hardy, like his poorer neighbours, loved an early cup of tea. Percy felt he had plenty of time before him.

"You must understand," he began, eagerly. "it's not a case of ordinary illness I want to tell you of. Something very terrible and alarming is going on at home, and my father calls it 'magic.' He says he's thought about it till he feels dazed. He only told me a week ago, and since that I've been waiting for an opportunity to consult you."

"About your sister?"

"Oh, no!" surprised at the question. "It has nothing whatever to do with Barbara. The person chiefly concerned is my father."

"I should have said Sir George was in perfect

health," hazarded the physician, "but you know my best help is at your service."

"And you won't laugh at me for consulting you when—perhaps—you'll say it's a case for the police!"

"I never laughed at anyone in trouble in my life. Your secrets shall be as sacred to me as my own. Now, Percy, I am all attention."

The old familiar name, the kind reassuring smile, seemed to carry Percy back to the days when he and Barbara were children, and a visit to Dr. Harley was one of their greatest treats. How he began he never knew, but in a few minutes he plunged into the story, and told it word for word, just as he had heard it, not forgetting to add his father's acknowledgment that the signatures of the strange cheques were actually in his own writing, and poor Sir George's pathetic assertion that he was perfectly sane.

"Of course he is," said John Harley, speaking for the first time, "as sane as I am. A healthy mind in a healthy body. Your father's a fine specimen of English manhood, and you may tell him I said so."

"That will comfort him. I really think, in spite of his protestations, this mystery has preyed on him so terribly he began to wonder if it could be a delusion of his own."

"It's no delusion," said the doctor, gravely; "it's the work of some scoundrel. Why, Percy, if it had been a mental hallucination of your father's the cheques would have been made out to the same person. The very choice of a different name each time, each name being so common it could excite no comment, points in my view to a redemption of skilful crime."

"But who could have done it?" burst from Percy. "Did I tell you the counter foils are filled up just as neatly as my father would have done it himself?"

"Wait a bit. Has Sir George taken any steps to put an end to the imposture?"

"How could he? How was his bankers not to pay these bogus cheques when he had no idea when they would be presented?"

"He might have circumvented the thief another way," said Dr. Harley, coolly; "have changed the place where he kept his cheque book, have made some alteration in his signature, and so on."

"I don't suppose that ever struck him."

"How much money has he lost in all?"

"I don't know. The amounts were trifling at first, but in the last twelve months they amounted to nine hundred pounds. It is rather startling that there should have been no cheque presented between January of this year and this present month June."

"And there was no particular caution used in that time?"

"No, the last cheque was for four hundred pounds, it was made payable to Messrs. Tomkins or order, and crossed."

"Crossed!" exclaimed the doctor, as if he suddenly saw daylight; "then you have a clue! Through what bank was it paid?"

"The Eastern Counties, through their Hillborough branch," was the prompt reply. "The odd thing is, doctor, that though the cheques—nine in all—were each drawn in favour of a different person, they were all cashed by this particular bank at Hillborough."

"Then Sir George ought at once to have gone there and made enquiries," was the quick rejoinder.

"If you'll believe me their all passing through the same bank never struck him. And he seems to have had a morbid dread of mentioning the matter to anyone, lest they should think him mad. He does not dispute the signatures; he only declares he could not remember ever writing them."

Dr. Harley sighed.

"You don't mean you think he did it and forgot it?" breathed Percy, anxiously.

"No, no; some men might, but not a strong, robust brain like your father's. The most painful part of it all never seems to have occurred to you; of course it is forgery, flagrant forgery, but it must have been committed by a member of Sir George's own household."

"I'd trust the old servants almost like myself,

and the young ones haven't been long enough in the house; besides, their writing isn't good enough."

"How came Sir George to confide in you?"

Percy coloured like a girl.

"He was impressing on me that if I married I must marry money. Then he went on to say that instead of repaying the instalments of the mortgage, as I had believed he did, he only made up the interest with the greatest difficulty; then he told me why."

"And you came to me thinking——"

"There are such things as lapses of memory and dual identities," said Percy, slowly. "My father had a terrible shock when he discovered Robert Lang's treachery. I thought he might have—perhaps in his sleep—devised some means of investing his money safely, and then in his waking moments forgotten it. Would such a state of things be possible?"

"Yes, in a man of a nervous, anxious temperament. If you were the loser of these sums, Percy, I should be quite prepared to find them invested in a different bank, under an assumed name, for you have what we doctors call, 'a highly-strung nervous system.' You take after your mother, Sir George is just the opposite."

"What shall I tell my father?"

"That the remedy lies in his own hands; he has only to go to Hillborough Bank and interrogate the manager."

"Would he be bound to answer?"

"Yes, if your father denied the signature being his. Hillborough isn't far, only fifty miles; you could get there and back in four hours, or less, if the trains fitted."

Still Percy hesitated.

"I know so little of these things," he said, slowly. "Would it get about? I think any more scandal about our name would be the death of my mother."

"I think the banker would be bound to secrecy. I have an uncle, a very old man now, who has a very responsible position in the 'Eastern Counties'; he's on the list of directors. If you like I'll go and see him, and find out?"

"But that's giving you such a lot of trouble."

"One doesn't mind trouble for an old friend; only mind you, Percy, it's not necessary; the man at Hillborough would be bound to give you the information, and my going to London must cause delay."

"Oh, that won't matter," said Percy, cheerfully. "Sir George feels quite safe for another few weeks; two of these cheques never come close together."

But he was mistaken. Three days later Sir George received a letter from his bankers saying that a cheque for two hundred pounds, presented by the Hillborough Bank, had been duly honoured, leaving a balance against him of ten pounds.

"I shall be ruined!" was the old man's wail as he put the letter into his son's hands. "Percy, if this isn't put a stop to I shall be in Eddiam, and your mother in the workhouse."

"It shall be put a stop to," said Percy, firmly. "I'll go over to Hillborough to-day; I won't wait for Harley's good office, I'll just go myself and see what I can do."

Sir George's dread of publicity was quite broken down; he was only anxious for his son to start.

"I can't go with you, I'm too upset," he said, brokenly, "but you'll manage better alone."

Percy Fellowes reached Hillborough about twelve, he found the bank a very small local affair, for the town itself had only about four thousand inhabitants. He sent in his card and was at once ushered into the manager's private room, where he found a pleasant, intelligent looking man, of five or six and-thirty.

"I have called about a most painful matter," began Mr. Fellowes, "a cheque purporting to be drawn by my father, Sir George Fellowes, of High Cliff Towers, has just been presented at his bank in London and duly honoured, but it was a forgery, and I have come here in my father's stead to ask you to kindly give me any information in your power respecting it."

"Certainly," said Mr. Carpenter, courteously, "but I think there is some mistake; we have only one customer who ever passes Sir George's

cheques through our bank, and he is quite above suspicion; there have been several during the last year and there has never been any complaint respecting them."

"Only tell me his name," breathed Mr. Fellowes; "indeed it is a point of most vital importance to us. My father utterly repudiates various cheques drawn on his bank and bearing his signature, but the writing is such a marvellous forgery that he has hesitated to come forward."

Mr. Carpenter looked aghast.

"Over two thousand pounds of Sir George's money has passed through our bank," he said, gravely, "you can't mean that all the cheques were forgeries."

"I do—but my father has been ill, and he got into a nervous state, and feared that, as the writing was so marvellously like his own, and the counter foils in his cheque book were filled in to correspond, no one would believe his testimony. I can only ask you in his name to do your best to help us by any information in your power."

"I will do that gladly, indeed, I am bound to; but, Mr. Fellowes, the most extraordinary part of the whole thing is that the customer who paid in these doubtful cheques was introduced to us by Sir George himself."

Percy started.

"Impossible."

"It is perfectly true . . . the name is Henry Roberts, and Sir George mentioned in his letter, he had recently been engaged as secretary to himself, but was now starting in business as a rent-receiver and general agent for various small properties in this district. I must confess," admitted Mr. Carpenter, "at the outset it struck me as a trifle odd that all the cheques paid into Mr. Roberts's account should be from Sir George Fellowes, but as the months passed on I grew used to it."

"Mr. Carpenter," said Percy emphatically, "I can assure you that no man of the name of Roberts has ever been employed by my father; the letter of introduction, like the cheques, was a forgery."

"There were two letters," said the manager; "the second was from the Vicar of High Cliff, at this moment I can't recall his name."

"Was it Melville?"

"Yes—I had quite forgotten it till you mentioned it; both letters have of course been destroyed but you might ask the Vicar if——"

"He has been dead nearly two years," said Percy sadly. "Mr. Carpenter, will you give me your customer Roberts's address; it may not be usual, but I think under the circumstances I have a right to ask for it."

"I will give it you certainly," said Mr. Carpenter, turning up the ledger.

Harry Roberts, c/o Mrs. Turner, 19, Wells-street, Dorton, Yorkshire. What's the matter?"

"That is hardly an address at all. I know Dorton well; it is only a few miles from High Cliff. Mrs. Turner keeps a stationer's shop and circulating library. She 'takes in' answers to advertisements and other letters for her customers. Of course, Roberts must be one of these, depend upon it he has no fixed place of abode, and we shall find it impossible to trace him."

"You think any of your clerks could give me a description of him; or do you remember him yourself?"

"I am certain they could not. Harry Roberts, to the best of my belief, has never entered the bank."

"But the money," gasped Percy fairly bewildered, "what becomes of that, does it just accumulate here, or does he simply draw on you by cheque?"

"He mostly manages his business by post. Two or three times, when he has been withdrawing unusually large sums, his wife has brought the cheques herself. Mrs. Roberts is one of the most perfect ladies I ever met. You said just now it would be impossible to trace him if he had no fixed place of abode, but he must have a house of some kind, he couldn't leave a woman like his wife without. From her appearance I should have taken her for a lady of high rank."

"Was she young——?"

Mr. Carpenter hesitated.

"I couldn't tell her age within a few years, she was under thirty and very beautiful. She might have been only one or two and twenty, and trouble have aged her. She was tall and stately, and moved like a princess, but she had one of the gentlest, saddest faces I ever saw, and she was always dressed in black. I suppose she was his wife, I took it for granted, but now I come to think, I remember that she always spoke of him as 'Mr. Roberts'; she never said 'My husband.'"

Half-an-hour later Percy Fellowes was in the train, being taken rapidly homewards, but his heart had a fresh terror now, for Mr. Carpenter's description, vague and incomplete though it might be, yet applied perfectly, oh the agony of the thought, to his sister Barbara.

CHAPTER XL

It was early winter in South Africa, which means, according to the calendar, that it was the "merry month" of May. Old Dr. Evans sat in his own particular den, a troubled look on his kindly face. There was no critical case among his patients at present. Port Agnes was unusually sultry, even for winter, which was its most healthy season, but yet it was impossible to look at the old man's anxious perturbed countenance without feeling certain there was something amiss.

His wife did not worry him with questions, she knew he would confide in her if she could be of any help, but the girls had not quite learnt her patient trust.

Minnie rebuked him merrily as a cruel old father, because he wouldn't rouse himself and take her for a long drive, finally departing alone in (pretended) dudgeon. Grace, who was older and more thoughtful, brought him a cup of tea, and begged to know if he had had bad news of David (the eldest brother, then in England).

"Tut, no!" said the old doctor rising to drink his tea, and smiling kindly at his tall girl, "I believe whenever I'm a bit grave you think there's something wrong with David. I don't know what you'll be over your sweetheart, Grace, when he comes to hand, but you're clean daft about your brother." Grace laughed heartily. She was so pretty she could afford to jest at not being engaged, though she had reached the venerable age of twenty-two.

"Why don't you go to your mother, child," went on the doctor, "she's got a tea-fight on, hasn't she?"

"Yes, but there are such a lot of people, papa, and they do talk so . . . you know they are full of Robert Lang's escape, and when I think of Olive Lester, and how infatuated she was about him, I don't like to hear them all running him down and declaring he's sure to be retaken."

"Bolt the door, Grace," was her father's unexpected command, then, as she obeyed, "come and sit down by me. What if I should tell you it was just Robert Lang's escape that was troubling me?"

It was an escape which just now formed the topic of the colony. Robert Lang, whom the court sentenced to seven years' penal servitude for illicit diamond trading, had escaped from prison; how, no one knew. Such an exploit had not been heard of for years; one of the wardens was missing, and the general idea was that, heavily bribed by Lang, this man had connived at his escape and joined his flight. Search had been made in every direction, but not the slightest clue had been found to the fugitives, and an idea was gaining ground that they had reached the gold-fields, where, in the crowd which flocked from every quarter to the newly discovered mining district; they would escape detection.

As, not a year before, Robert Lang, as "Vane Carlyon," had been the darling of Port Agnes ball-rooms, the keenest excitement prevailed as to his fate, and no other topic had been discussed in the town. Dr. Evans had said less on the subject than any member of his family, and the idea that his anxiety (which they had all remarked) could be anything to do with Robert Lang seemed impossible.

"You are old enough to hold your tongue and keep a secret," he said to his favourite child, "and I must talk to someone. When our old friend, David Lester, made me his daughter's guardian, or rather trustee, his one desire and prayer was that I should protect Olive to the utmost of my power from Lang."

"But it was so long ago," said Grace, simply. "Vane Carlyon—as we thought him then—went off in June, when Mr. Lester refused his consent to the engagement, and Olive never saw him again. It isn't likely he would seek her out even if he went to England. Bad men are always fickle."

"I am going to trust you with a secret, Grace. You must keep it from that chatterbox, Minnie, and I would rather you did not discuss it even with your mother. Olive Lester and Vane Carlyon met frequently after she left here last August. They were positively engaged, and but for the discovery of Carlyon's identity with Robert Lang, but for his arrest, poor Olive would have been his wife."

He hesitated a little at the end of his sentence as though pausing to choose his words; but Grace never noticed that.

"Then it was Lang's arrest that brought on Olive's illness in January?"

"Yes." "And you would not let us go to see her because you were afraid we should talk of Lang's trial. You know it was in everyone's mouth then just as his escape is now."

"Right again, child! Without meaning it you might have hurt Olive's feelings terribly; and now here is my dilemma, her father is dead. I am the only friend she has who knows how far things went between her and Lang. Ought I to tell her he is at liberty?"

"Does she still believe in him?" asked Grace. "I fancy Olive would be true to a man through any ordeal."

"Her love did not outlive her trust," said the old doctor, gravely. "When she knew Lang's true character—and he is a blacker sheep than you can guess—Grace, she shrank from him with loathing. When she heard his sentence, she and her father thanked Heaven that for seven years she was safe from his pursuit."

"I don't understand," said Grace, in a puzzled tone. "If she no longer cares for him he can't make her marry him."

"My dear," said the doctor, rather testily, for he was keeping back the one fact which would have made all clear to Grace, "Olive Lester is a very rich woman. If Lang goes to England and finds her out he can levy black mail on her cruelly. Just because she was on the eve of eloping with him he can spread such a scandal about her that straight-laced English matrons would be horrified. He can destroy her peace, her safety, and—in a measure—her good name. For her dead father's sake I would do anything in the world to prevent Robert Lang's finding Olive Lester; but the question in my mind is this. At present Olive believes him safe within prison walls for six years more. Till the term of his sentence expires she won't worry herself with fears of his pursuit. Shall I let her go on in this false security, or shall I tell her the truth that Lang is at large and will soon reach England?"

"What good would it do!"

"She would be on her guard. She would shun all strangers, avoid all places where she would be likely to meet him."

Grace Evans shook her head.

"Let Olive be happy now or at least in peace, papa. Robert Lang may never reach England. He may never seek Olive, or if he does he may not find her. If you tell her of his escape you rob her of six years' peace of mind, and after all you gain nothing. Olive's face would never be forgotten by any creature who had once seen it. She couldn't keep herself shut up so carefully that no stranger could catch a glimpse of her. No, to warn her of Robert Lang's freedom would be needless cruelty."

"Perhaps you are right," said the doctor, gravely; "anyway, Gracey, I will take your advice, and thankfully, for the doubt of what was best to do has tortured me."

"Olive was very beautiful," said Grace, rather bitterly; "but I think she has acted most ungratefully. Think of all the friends she had here. Some of them loved her dearly, yet since she went to England she has never written to one of them except you. And when Minnie and I sent our love in your letter, and begged her to write to us, she took no notice."

"That is my fault, Grace. I advised Olive to break off all intercourse with Port Agnes."

"But why? Of course she is a great deal richer than we are, but she never used to think much about money."

"Don't you see, Gracey, I always foresaw the time when Lang would be out 'on ticket of leave,' and I wanted to cut off all clue to Olive? Supposing he knew her address in England, he might present himself before her and claim her promise!"

"I begin to understand," said Grace; "poor Olive, I have had very harsh thoughts of her."

"Save them for Robert Lang, my dear, he richly deserves them all."

"I've been thinking, papa," said Grace, slowly, "it wouldn't do to frighten Olive, but if there was any friend of hers who could protect her if trouble came, it wouldn't be a bad idea to give them a hint that Robert Lang was at liberty!"

And then, with an affectionate hug, Grace left the doctor to write his letter, for this was English mail day.

Dr. Evans rapidly reviewed the "friends" mentioned in Olive's few letters to him; the Fellowes, he felt, were nearer to her than her relations at Penge. A simple, kindly man, he had never mastered the fact that the gentleman who wrote so kindly about Olive, and said his wife was delighted to keep her during her illness, was a baronet.

Sir George's letter not being handy, and the initial of the signature not being fresh in the doctor's memory, he had addressed his note to—Fellowes, Esq., High Cliff Towers, Yorkshire, and the note itself was, unfortunately, so vaguely worded that it very far from expressed his meaning.

"MY DEAR SIR,—

"From your kind letter to me respecting my unfortunate young friend, I venture to ask you another favour on Miss Durant's behalf. The only enemy she has in the world is now at liberty. We feel no doubt that he will proceed to England, and that his first step will be to search for Olive. I am unwilling to disturb her peace of mind by telling her of this danger. If you, who, I gather from Olive's letters, are still a near neighbour of hers, would extend to her your kindness and protection in the event of her being molested by this scoundrel, you would have earned the truest gratitude of her dead father as well as that of,

"Yours respectfully,

"DAVID EVANS."

"It can do no harm," thought the doctor, as he sealed and directed it; "it does not betray the poor child's secret, and Mr. Fellowes seems by his letters to be a kind, fatherly sort of man; it was his own daughter who found Olive in the snow, and by taking her home saved her life; he can't mind my asking him to help her."

There was only one delivery of letters at High Cliff Towers, but if anyone from there passed the post-office after two o'clock, they could obtain the letters which, otherwise, would wait there till the next day.

Percy, on his way home from his expedition to Hillborough, called as usual at the post-office, and received sundry letters for his parents (Barbara never wrote or received letters since her illness), and one solitary missive for himself; it bore an African stamp and post-mark. Remembering that the man who had so cruelly wronged his family was a prisoner in that distant country, all sorts of speculations filled Percy's mind as he tore open the envelope.

Had Robert Lang been stricken with sudden illness, and on his death-bed confessed his sins? What could have happened that he should write to Percy, the one member of the Fellowes family he had specially detested?

The heading, "Port Agnes," at the top of the sheet, told Percy the letter did not concern the convict, for no prisoners are kept at the Bay. As he read on to the end, he saw at once the epistle was intended for his father, but felt that in Sir George's present state of personal anxiety, he would be quite unable to give any attention to Olive Durant's troubles, so there could be no harm in Percy keeping the letter secret, and trying to do his best himself for the girl he so passionately loved.

"The letter told him nothing he had not guessed; he had been certain ever since the afternoon when Olive fainted at the bare prospect of meeting a missionary from Port Agnes, that she had left an enemy behind her in her southern home, and that her choice of High Cliff as a residence was only due to her desire to live in a remote country place where she was not likely to meet many colonists.

For a few minutes he forgot his mission to Hillborough, and the terrible mystery that hung over his family; forgot even his fears that his sister had a part in it; for a brief space he could think only of Olive, and the trouble which threatened her.

Alice Melville might be trusted; Alice would be true as steel, and one who saw Olive daily and hourly must be better able to shield her from painful intrusion than he who was but a chance visitor.

Yes, he would tell Alice of Dr. Evans's letter, and get her to bring her woman's wit to bear on it, but all the time Percy knew that but for the barrier of Olive Durant's gold, he would have thrown himself at her feet and begged her to become his wife, thus giving him the right to protect and guard her from all sorrow.

Percy had set out to walk home; the Fellowes had reduced their establishment lately, a brougham and pair was now their only conveyance; this carriage could be opened in fine weather, and so suited all purposes, while the horses, being fine, fast-stepping animals, were ridden by Sir George and his son when they wanted a mount.

The retrenchment had been a bitter pang to the Baronet, but Percy had persuaded him into it. It had been talked of before the old man confided his strange story to his son, and after that Percy had urged the point so strongly his father had to give in.

So as his mother contemplated an afternoon drive, Mr. Fellowes had said he would walk from the station; it was nearer four miles than three, and a baking hot summer afternoon, but Percy had so much to fill his thoughts, so many anxieties crowded through his brain, that he felt neither heat nor fatigue.

He had just come within a mile of the lodges, when Dr. Harley's carriage dashed up, and the physician stopping it abruptly as he recognised Percy, begged him to jump in.

"It's hardly worth while," said the young man cheerfully, "for I don't suppose you are going far in my direction, but I want particularly to make an appointment with you. I've a lot to say when can you give me a quiet hour?"

Only then did he notice the strange gravity of the doctor's face.

"There's nothing the matter," cried Percy, anxiously; "you don't mean that you've been sent for to the Towers? Oh!" his anxiety gaining ground as Dr. Harley kept silent, "don't say there's anything wrong with my father."

"I believe Sir George is perfectly well," said Dr. Harley. "I got a note from him half an hour ago, begging me to come at once. Unfortunately I was with a dangerous case at the other end of the parish all the morning, and so the note had been waiting for me two hours when I got it."

"But what's wrong?"

Dr. Harley shook his head, and put the note into Percy's hand.

It was exactly like Sir George, short, impressive, and unsatisfactory, giving as little information as possible.

"DEAR HARLEY,

"Pray come to us at once. Lose not a moment.

"Yours, G. F."

Percy could not understand it. He had left them all perfectly well that morning, the note had been written only one hour after he started for Hillborough. What had happened? It was with fiercest impatience he sat by Dr. Harley's side as they drove quickly on through the pleasant shady lanes to High Cliff Towers.

(To be continued.)

CINDERELLA.

—101— CHAPTER I.

PEOPLE said that Forbes Rivers had "made a complete fool of himself" by his second marriage, and no two people more heartily expounded this belief than his daughters by his first marriage, Caroline and Matilda.

That a man of their father's age (fifty-five his last birthday); a man who had outlived, or, at any rate, ought to have outlived, sentiment and romance; who had a comfortable, luxurious home, a splendid manager in his eldest daughter, should take to himself a little insignificant chit, twenty-five years his junior, a chit who had been a governess, who was half French, who had neither money, family, nor (in their opinion) beauty, or anything whatever to recommend her, was beyond the comprehension of any sane person, so said the Misses Rivers, and they were not only sane, but sensible beyond their age.

He did not dare to break the news of his impending marriage by word of mouth; he was, perhaps, a little in awe of his two young ladies.

No, he wrote to them from Paris, and announced that he was going to give them a stepmother, who would be more like their sister than anything else, and that the marriage would make no real difference to them in any way.

"Such nonsense!" as they ejaculated, after the first stormy outbreak was over; "he wrote like a child, instead of a man of five-and-fifty! Who was to be mistress of the house? Why Mrs. Rivers, of course! Who was to keep the keys, order the carriage, sit at the head of the table, invite the company to that very board? Again, Mrs. Rivers, of course!

And would this make no real difference whatever to Matilda who had reigned supreme over Mount Rivers since her eighteenth birthday? Matilda, who kept the keys, ordered the servants hither and thither, loiled in the seat of honour in the big landau, patronized her poorer neighbours, and sat at the head of her father's table!

Matilda would now be a cipher. She would probably no longer be heiress to the estates. She would be a mere unnoticed nobody—and this was to make no difference! Such an assertion was merely adding insult to injury.

Then, as to Caroline; if Matilda was ambitious, Carrie was vain. The aums and sums she spent in dress was scarcely credible; in spite of her father's handsome allowance and constant presents she was always in debt.

Her career would be curbed. No more sixty-guinea ball dresses from Madame Elise; no more ravishing cotton costumes, price fifteen pounds! Probably no maid all to herself, but one between her and Matilda!

These ladies were in a dreadful state of mind! If their father had been dying they could not have worn longer faces, perhaps not so long.

They talked of this dreadful marriage far and near, and really with such effect that many people sincerely pitied "the poor Rivers girls" very much indeed; "and fancy a governess," they added with uplifted eyes and hands, "after marrying an Earl's daughter for his first wife!"

Yes; his first wife had been Lady Charlotta Thyn, daughter (portionless) of the Earl of Bareacres, and Matilda and Caroline were never long in the society of any stranger before "my uncle, the Earl of Bareacres," had been, so to speak, dragged in neck and heels.

Lady Charlotta had not been, strictly speaking, beautiful, and her daughters resembled her

more than their good-looking father, who had well-cut features, an upright carriage, and was a very young-looking man, despite his fifty-five winters, and looked more like a brother than a parent to the Misses Rivers, who, on their part, were ill-used by Time; he seemed to have added the years to them that he had borrowed from their father, and though they were only one and two and twenty, they were easily mistaken for six or seven years more.

People said it was their restlessness, their insatiable ball-going propensities, their tempers, that thus aged them prematurely. In appearance they were both tall, with very neat, slim figures; they had sharp, turned-up noses, and scanty hair, Matilda was dark, with a high colour, rather prominent teeth, and muddy-brown eyes; Matilda was clever. Caroline was fair, sandy hair, grey-green eyes, and a very good complexion; indeed, by stretching your imagination a little bit you might call her pretty; her fair skin, her youth, her good figure, and her exquisite toilettes, went a long way. She was not clever, but she was no fool, and for obstinacy and tenacity of purpose it would have been difficult to find her match within the four seas.

Some said the Misses Rivers had only themselves to blame for their father's second marriage. It was all very well in the autumn and winter, but from February to July they were from home—in town, under the wing of an aristocratic relation, who introduced them to society for a very considerable "consideration"—a poor but proud aunt who received her nieces into her small house in Chesham-street, permitting her brother-in-law to pay the rent, the hire of her carriages and horses, her wine merchant's bill, and a few other odds and ends.

Mr. Rivers hated London, and revolted against "a house for the season," but he had no objection to this compromise, since Lady Augusta said it was necessary that the girls should be properly brought out and downright cruelty to keep them down in the country from year's end to year's end. So the two young ladies left their dear papa to his own devices for six months of the year; and, you see, they discovered, to their sorrow and indignation, that during one of their lengthy absences their dear papa had got into mischief.

It would be hard to say which of the young ladies was the most embittered against this unwished-for intruder into the home circle. Matilda had had visions of marrying Lord Rockfort, a neighbouring and somewhat impecunious nobleman, whose few scanty acres marched with her father's fine property. He had thrown out more than one hint with regard to "looking about for a wife and settling down"—a hint which Miss Rivers was not slow to appropriate to herself; but now, supposing her father were to be surrounded by a large, young family? Supposing an heir was born! She knew very well that the bells that rang for his birth would ring a knell to all her rosy-tinted schemes, and farewell for ever to the prospect of a coronet.

These ladies had at first declared that they would leave the paternal roof-tree, and take refuge with Aunt Augusta, but as ways and means were dubious, Aunt Augusta was dubious too, and strongly advised them to stay at Mount Rivers—at any rate for the present, and stay they did.

In due time the master of the house returned home with his bride, who received a very tepid reception from her two daughters (daughters who looked older than she did). A nobody she might be and a pauper to boot, but even they were obliged to acknowledge that she was not a chit. She was tall—unusually tall—slight, very graceful, dark, and foreign-looking. She had a pale, clear, oval face, magnificent teeth and eyes, and black hair which fell below her waist, but was usually bound round and round her head in tight thick coils. Every movement bespoke grace—unstudied and natural. She spoke English with a slightly foreign accent, and in a wholly bewitching, somewhat plaintive manner; her bearing to her step-children was deprecatory, if not actually humble, and she shrank back from putting herself forward as much as it was possible for her to do.

She was deferred to by her infatuated husband, and she in turn deferred to Miss Rivers, and excused herself and all her bridal glories in many tempting opportunities for display, but it availed her nothing; it was a case of the inch and the ell—the more she voluntarily gave up the more Miss Rivers wished to seize. She ordered the dinner, the carriage, and the servants as of yore, and reinstated herself at the head of the table, as young Mrs. Rivers was ignorant of carving as one of the statues on the terrace.

She was very quiet, rather inert and dreamy, passed hours in long reveries, with her hands lying idly in her lap, her eyes fixed on vacancy, and was written down by her eldest step-daughter as a fool—an indolent fool!

She was very deferential to her elderly husband, and responded to all his remarks with animation; seemed to rouse herself to study his wishes, to make herself pleasant and agreeable, and to adapt herself to her new life; but now and then, when promenading the moonlight terrace with him after dinner, her fox-eyed relatives had remarked her from the windows. How she yawned on the sly! How bored she seemed! Lookers-on see most of the game.

She was not one atom in love with their father. How could she be?—a man who had a start of her in life of a quarter-of-a-century? Query? Why had she married him?—for his money, of course, was the prompt and natural answer, but strange to say, she cared for no display. She dressed very plainly—too plainly for Caroline's opinion.

She preferred a drive in a little pony-trap to all the glories of powdered servants, blood horses, and open carriage.

She had never even asked to see the family diamonds. She had said more than once to her step-daughters in her pretty foreign, not broken English,—

"You father has been so good to me—so good to me! I am so grateful to him—this is such peace—such rest!"

What on earth did the young woman mean? In a short time, despite her retiring, unassuming manners, young Mrs. Rivers had made herself very popular.

"She was so quiet," the servants said; "so gentle—such a lady!" and her youth and good looks and sweet low voice went a long way in her favour.

She was very different, the household declared, "to them," meaning anything but a complimentary allusion—"them," the autocratic, hard-to-be-pleased, ever-worrying, step-daughters.

Her manners were so amiable. She allowed these young ladies to ride roughshod over her, and they laughed to each other when they compared her to the traditional stepmother—they themselves were more like that.

Matilda never spared her, and carried her rudeness, her ferocity, so to speak, so far as even to amaze her younger and more placable sister. As, for instance, one day when they were discussing a new historical novel, and all were doubtful of one rather startling statement, Miss Matilda coolly remarked, as she shut up the book,—

"There may be some allowance for *our* ignorance, but I'm surprised that *you* don't know, Mrs. Rivers!"

"But why—why should I know more than you? Why should I be better informed than you and Carrie?" she protested, politely.

"Because," returned Miss Rivers, bluntly, "you were a governess, and had all these matters at your fingers' ends."

"Pardon me!" replied the other, colouring, not merely at the remark, but the stinging tone in which her amiable step-daughter spoke. "I was never a governess."

"Then what were you? I always thought so till now; but perhaps," with ironical politeness, "I ought not to ask."

"Oh, yes, certainly you may know; indeed, why should you not? I was companion to Madame de Villière in Paris, where your father saw me!"

"Ah! indeed!" exclaimed Miss Rivers, in a

tone that implied that if there were a lower depth for impecunious ladies in the social scale than governess it was the situation of companion, and the subject dropped.

Being half French, it was not surprising that Mrs. Rivers received a good many foreign letters—long, long letters—on thin paper and very closely written, as her relatives did not fail to remark, but who they were from they could not even guess; their recipient was very close about her affairs. One thing was certain, that often after post-hour she had been surprised with traces of tears in her face.

Resolved not to clash in any way with his daughter's arrangements, Mr. Rivers set up a new equipage for his new wife—a Stanhope phaeton, and a pair of blood chestnuts, who stepped to their noses with their forelegs, and occasionally banged the splashboard with their hind one!

The price he gave for these he never divulged even to his coachman; and the latter worthy, though he admitted that they were the finest pair of horses in the county, mentally added, "and a pair of real demons, and more than the master can manage," but this reflection he prudently kept to himself; as if it got to Mr. Rivers's ears, who particularly fancied himself as a coachman, it might cost him his very comfortable situation.

Day after day did the Misses Rivers watch their father and stepmother tearing down the steep avenue behind the rampant chestnuts, and fervently thanked their stars that they were not of the party. They did not envy Mrs. Rivers her drive.

She was frightened enough too, they could see although she said nothing. Her face was unusually pale, her eyes fixed, her lips twitched, and her hands were convulsively clasped together, as she sat beside her husband.

Previous to the start, whilst the horses enjoyed a few preliminary gambols, such as rearing up on end and lashing out behind—their play, as Mr. Rivers called it, and he liked it—he showed off his own prowess as horse-tamer to the (did he but know) secretly agonized trembling girl beside him.

Once she ventured a timid remonstrance after an unusually exciting drive, but she was pool-poohed, and told not to be silly; there was not an ounce of vice about them, and it was nothing but their high spirits and play.

"Play to them, death to us!" she returned.

"I am sure we shall be killed some day!"

Her assertion made her companion quite indignant at the time; but her words proved to be prophetic.

CHAPTER II.

ONE day Mr. and Mrs. Rivers were returning home, the chestnuts pulling like steam-engines. They met an engine—a traction engine—quite suddenly, coming round a corner of a road.

The horses stopped, as if they had been shot just for one second; then, with one wild dash, wheeled right round, within a hairbreadth of capsizing the Stanhope, and galloped down the road like a pair of wild animals.

Mr. Rivers had lost all control over them, and Mrs. Rivers over herself. Her screams only added wings to their feet.

"I told you they would kill us!" she gasped to her companion, "and here it is. Oh!" covering her face with her hands as they came in contact with the pier of a stone bridge; and there was one grand crash, a sound of kicking and struggling of hoofs, and it was over.

Some country people running up found Mr. Rivers had been flung out on his head. He had come against the upper pier of the bridge. He was as dead as a stone they declared. She looked like it too.

The carriage was in splinters, the cushions and rug in the dust; one horse lay pumping out his life-blood with every respiration, and the other had kicked himself clear, and gone probably into the next county.

It was a terrible business. Such a carriage

accident had not been known in those parts before.

A doctor was procured and two stretchers. Mrs. Rivers was removed to a large neighbouring farm-house, for she breathed, the other was no longer *he*; Mr. Rivers had become *it*!

The corpse was slowly carried home on the shoulders of some stout labourers, and the news was carefully broken to the ladies.

They were naturally greatly shocked and horrified at the awful suddenness of their father's death, and after the first burst of grief was over, hastened down to the farm to see their father's widow.

She was still insensible; they could do nothing for her. She was in the hands of a most experienced doctor; so leaving her own maid in attendance, they returned home, and sat late into the night talking, and wondering, and planning, and occasionally lamenting the parent who a few hours before had been as full of life as themselves, and who now lay stiff and stark, and motionless in a state bedroom upstairs.

News came to them next morning early that Mrs. Rivers had given birth to a daughter, who was a fine healthy baby, but that she was sinking fast, and again the Misses Rivers hastened to her bedside.

She did not recognize them. They saw their new sister—a red-faced morsel—with tightly clenched hands, wrapped up in impromptu baby clothes; and Miss Rivers was very devoutly thankful to Providence that it was not a boy.

The patient was young, and made a long struggle for life. She regained her senses, and lingered for nearly three weeks.

At first she had called almost night and day, in a low, plaintive voice, for "Nathalie." Who was this Nathalie whose name was always on her lips!

She talked volubly in a foreign tongue, not French; but after a time, when her senses were unclouded, she resumed the English language, and no more was heard of Nathalie.

She knew that her husband had been killed—seemed to accept it without any one telling her of it, and showed no emotion, shed no tears.

"I am dying, too," was all she murmured; "and who is to take care of my poor little baby? Oh, if Nathalie was alive!" she murmured, half to herself; "but now there is no one—no one!"

Mrs. Carson, the mistress of the farm-house, who had attended on her patient with an unwearied devotion, stoutly combatted this talk of dying.

"Nonsense, mum, you'll be as well as ever in two months. There, you must not get such foolish notions into your head, nor be so low about yourself. You've made a wonderful rally, considering all things."

"I shall be low enough," she returned, calmly. "This time two months the grass will be growing on my grave. I want to see Miss Rivers alone next time she comes. I'm going to ask her to be a mother to my little one. Don't you think she will be good to it, Mrs. Carson?" imploringly.

Mrs. Carson had her own very decided opinion on that head, but did not dare give it utterance. Her niece was Miss Rivers' maid, and if no man is a hero to his valet, no woman is a heroine to her abigail.

However, in reply to her patient's beseeching dark eyes, she muttered something about "Any one would be good to it; of course, but why wouldn't the child have its own mother?"

"I have had some of my things brought down here by Lucy (Mrs. Rivers' maid)—desk and dressing case. I want, when I can, to look over them, but in any case, Mrs. Carson, you are to have this"—producing her watch and chain from under the pillow, and tendering it in a very shaky thin hand—"as a little remembrance of me, and as a token of gratitude for your great—great kindness."

"Heaven bless you, Mrs. Rivers, I won't take it! Please goodness, you'll want it yourself," standing back two steps, and throwing up her plump hands with a gesture of deprecation.

"If I ever do want it you can give it back to me again, but take it now. Here, I can't hold it any longer," and under these circumstances, and

to save the watch from falling on the floor, Mrs. Carson accepted it under protest.

The same afternoon Miss Rivers came to pay her daily visit, and was cloistered alone with her dying companion for a long time.

"I'm sure you and Carrie thought it hard to bear your father marrying again," she asked, frankly, lying back on her pillows and looking gravely at the startled visitor, "but I did my best not to trouble you, and it was not for long."

"Oh, you will get better, Mrs. Rivers, of course, you will. The doctor thinks you are much stronger the last two days."

"Am I? It's the flicker of the candle before it goes out," she returned, quietly, "and I have not many days, perhaps not many hours to live."

"How can you talk in this way? How can you bear it?" demanded the other, rather hysterically. She did not like to be with a person alone who could, as it were, look into her own yawning grave with calm self-possession; it seemed to bring her herself into the region of the dead.

"Because I do not mind. All I care for now are dead. I am going to them. I have not had a happy life. I have seen great—great troubles. Oh!" covering her face with her thin hands, "may my darling baby have a happier lot than mine," shuddering as she spoke. "She will; I feel it," once more removing her hands and looking at Matilda, who in her very expensive mourning and deep crepe veil thrown back sat on the edge of a chair near the foot of the bed.

"I leave her in your charge, Matilda—yours and Carrie's—but you especially. You will be a mother to her, I know. She is of your own blood. I know you will be good to her, will you not?"

Of course Miss Rivers hastened to say, "Yes, yes," with alacrity, carried away for the moment by her surroundings, by the dying woman's pleading eyes and trembling lips. She was ready to promise anything, and felt for the moment quite a glow of compassion and warmth for her little half-sister.

"Talk to her about me sometimes," said her mother; "and call her Pauline."

Her breath came with difficulty, and she spoke with an effort,—

"In my dressing-case are all my jewels. Keep them for her. They are more valuable than you would suppose, and the only fortune I can leave her—and bury me by night."

"By night!" echoed Miss Rivers in amazement.

"Yes. By torchlight. It is the custom in our family. Let me be carried to the grave, and do not lay me in a vault, but in the ground, where the green grass will grow and the wind blow above my head."

"Have you no relations who ought to know?" stammered Matilda, after a pause.

"I have, but I have been dead to them for years already."

"Mrs. Rivers," said Matilda, rising, and coming closer to her patient and taking her hand in her's; "You are leaving me in your place as mother to your child. I solemnly promise to fulfil a mother's duty by her, but tell me who are you? I ought to know for her sake."

A dead pause, during which the dying woman surveyed her with a dreamy, abstracted gaze.

"We never were told who you were," continued Miss Rivers, eagerly, "excepting that my father met you in Paris. You were a dependent and had no relations. Your name was Warren."

"That is all true, except the last. I was a dependent. I had no relations. The name was my mother's."

"Then there is some mystery about you. You are not what you seem?"

A shake of the head was the only answer.

"And who were you? What was your real name? Where did you come from? Tell me all this, for your child's sake. Do, I implore you."

"It—it does not matter," very faintly. "She is a Rivers. She is one of you."

"And is she to know nothing of her mother—not even her name?"

"Yes—she is—she shall," half raising herself

in the effort. "I—my name was—I am—"

Whatever she was going to say remained unsaid.

A deathlike pallor stole over her features, her eyes remained fixed on her interlocutor in a glassy stare; there was no sigh, no struggle, no conflict to mark the passing away of a soul.

Just as she was about to utter her name, to divulge the secret of her life, Death had stepped in with his icy fingers, and laid them on her lips.

Miss Rivers stood for some seconds, nay, some minutes, with the dead woman's hand in hers, petrified, as if turned into stone; and then, when she really grasped the fact that she was alone with the dead, she rent the whole farm-house with her piercing shrieks, and brought in Mrs. Carson, her sister, the nurse, and maid, all running.

It was quite true. Mrs. Rivers' words were prophetic for a second time.

She had not lived many hours, as she predicted, and the child was now an orphan, and wholly dependent on the good offices of its two step-sisters.

It was a fine thriving little creature, and was put out to nurse.

Mrs. Rivers was buried by her own wish by night, by torchlight.

The funeral created a great sensation in the county; such a strange one was never known, and crowds flocked to it from mere curiosity more than anything else.

Fifty torch-bearers with mourning scarves lit up the gloomy graveyard, and looked weird and strange in and out among the trees.

By the light of these fifty torches the coffin was lowered to the grave in a bright blaze of light, whilst the utmost parts of the churchyard were clothed in impenetrable gloom.

"It was a very impressive ceremony," some said; others that "it made them feel creepy, it was so weird and unnatural;" others "that it was theatrical; but what could you expect from a foreigner?"

In time, in the traditional nine days the talk had died away, and young Mrs. Rivers and her midnight funeral were all but forgotten.

Over her grave a plain white stone was erected, on which was carved,—

"PAULINE RIVERS,
Died May 12th, 1863."

And within two months from the day she had so composedly talked of her death to Mrs. Carson the grass was growing over her grave.

Mrs. Rivers' will was duly read, and created a tremendous sensation when its contents were known.

He was a man of most procrastinating habits, and had simply re-made his will after his marriage in the same terms as before, always meaning to provide for his young wife by deed of gift, and always putting it off.

There was, consequently, no mention whatever of her in document, much less of her child.

The place and estate went to his eldest born, and a very large sum in the funds to his second daughter, and there was nothing for Pauline.

She was, so to speak, unacknowledged by her father, ignorant of her mother's name and history, and a little wail in the Rivers family, without any claims on any one, except Matilda's solemn promise to her dead mother that she would fill her place.

We shall see from Pauline's own history how this promise was fulfilled.

The dressing-case was taken away promptly from worthy Mrs. Carson's care, but the desk, a shabby, old-fashioned mahogany one, was left behind.

Matilda had looked into it and seen nothing but a bundle of letters in a foreign hand and a foreign language, and had told Mrs. Carson to

throw them into the fire and do what she liked with the desk.

Mrs. Carson locked it up carefully, letters and all, and put it away on the top of her own big four-post bed.

"It will come in yet," she said, "maybe little Polly will be glad to have it," meaning Pauline.

The dressing-case was another matter! That Miss Rivers and Carrie took home with them on the front seat of the carriage, and opened at their leisure in their morning room after dinner. It was black, bound with heavy silver clamps, very strong and old-fashioned, and had a monogram "P. D." in various places.

When it was opened the Misses Rivers' eyes were opened too. Their exclamations were low, but emphatic.

What rings!—what a set of turquoise and diamonds!—what opals and emeralds! and, finally, in the lowest drawer, embedded in ruby velvet, what diamonds!

Their own little family belongings looked poor pinchbeck—mere paste—in comparison. They were very quaint old settings; there was a tiara, a stomacher, a necklace, brooch, earrings, bracelets.

They must be worth thousands, the sisters exclaimed to each other; they are far better than the Duchess of Dover's. But why did she keep them locked up? Why did she never wear them? Why indeed?

CHAPTER III.

THE orphan, in fact, was put out to nurse with a respectable farmer's wife, and thrived in an amazing manner—as children, who are little waifs and strays, not infrequently do.

The first thing she could remember was a large farm-house with a pond near it and little yellow ducks, and a stout, merry-looking woman, with very ruddy cheeks.

This was Mrs. Meadows her foster-mother. She lived with her till she was six years old, and her first recollections were all of the country, and cowslips and buttercups and roses, and big horses, and hay-making—a snug little brown wooden cot beside Mrs. Meadows' wide four-poster, with a gay patchwork quilt.

Very tired and sleepy-eyed she used to be from running about in the yard and fields all day.

And she was very happy, and wished for nothing better than that life at the farm, and dreaded the state visits twice or three times a year, that were paid by two grand ladies in silk dresses, who came in a fine open carriage which stopped below in the road.

"Your sisters have come," Mrs. Meadows would declare, hurrying out to the garden or hayfield, and capturing her in spite of herself.

"The ladies wanted to see her," she would add, "and she must be a good girl and behave pretty, and come in and have her face washed and have on a clean pinafore."

But somehow she never did "behave pretty" on these occasions but would come in very reluctantly behind her kind protector with a lowering brow and one finger in her mouth, and glare at her relations defiantly, in return for their cold, critical, steady stare, and would have to stand up and say "The Little Busy Bee," or "Twinkle twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are," and would have to get up and walk about to show how much she had grown, her sisters exchanging audible confidences, and evidently under the impression that she was not merely stupid, but deaf.

"How plain she is—no look of us—no breeding about her," one would remark.

"And what a bad countenance and a loutish look. I suppose she takes after her mother's side. She is certainly not distinguished-looking—I'm sure she has a vile temper."

These flattering criticisms always took place whilst Mrs. Meadows was absent, bent on hospitality; her return, beaming behind a tray laden with home-made cake and elder-flower wine, was a signal for discreet silence. She would not hear a word against her protégée—she was her idol,

and had taken the place of a child of her own, who had died two days after it was born, and I do believe she really, at times, fancied Pauline was actually her own flesh and blood. "Missy" was perfection in her eyes, and there is no doubt that "Missy," as she called her, was spoiled. She had two sons—Dan, a youth of fifteen, and Isaac, or Jack, who was about ten—both Missy's slaves.

Missy was the only "girl" on the premises, and was made a great deal of. Her remarks or rejoinders were quoted and circulated as wonders of juvenile wit. Her hair was boasted of openly as "apun gold." Her hands and feet were considered marvels, and if her small head was not turned it was a wonder. They did not think her unsmooth or coarse; they treated her like a little princess, one and all.

Farmer Meadows took her on his knee in the igloo nook at night, and cracked nuts and roasted apples for her, and told her fairy tales. Dan gave her rides on Dobbin, and on the hay-carts. Isaac played with her, and made her daisy chains and cowslip balls, and he and she sat side by side in the deep old family pew on Sundays, and often—indeed, generally—Missy fell asleep during the sermon, and rested her drowsy head upon his patient shoulder.

Missy had her own garden, her kitten, her chickens, and was as happy as the day was long. The only little cloud in her horizon was the "visit," which occurred about twice a year—an honour she dreaded with unaccountable aversion.

But her halcyon days were coming to an end; letters from abroad came to the farm—letters that were read, re-read, and pored over by Mr. and Mrs. Meadows and even Dan, and there was a great deal of solemn talk and discussion those winter evenings over the logs. Friends were called in to give counsel and their advice, and Farmer Meadows's own wishes were the same.

His brother was doing well in Canada, and wanted him and his family to join him—times were hard for farmers in the old country—there had been several bad wet seasons, foot-and-mouth disease among the cattle. It was a hard, up-hill life, and the Meadows's were resolved to go and begin a new existence on the other side of the herring pond.

"What was to be done with Missy?" that was a question that was debated with more anxiety than the sale of the lease, the price of the calves, and the probable results of the auction!

They could not take her, the climate would be too trying, they would be living quite in the rough at first, and have their hands more than full. Still, how hard it would be to part with her; she who had been with them since she was a fortnight old; who had, so to speak, grown up, learned to walk and talk among them, and was like one of themselves.

And if leaving "Missy" behind was painful to the Meadows, if the prospect of their separation caused her good nurse frequently to catch her up in her arms, hug her, kiss her, and cry over her, what would the reality be to the child!

She laughed and played and snowballed Jack, and roasted chestnuts with Dan, and helped "Mama," as she called her, in the dairy, never realising what was going to happen to her and the change that was impending.

One bleak morning Missy was wrapped up in her best and warmest clothes and kissed many times by Dan and Jack, then mounted into the gig in "mam's" lap, and driven off by Farmer Meadows himself.

"Where was she going?" she asked, anxiously. "She was going home," was the answer, "and was to be a good girl, and had her kitty to play with to prevent her being lonesome—there it was under the seat in a basket."

The drive was long, and after asking dozens of questions, she fell asleep, and did not wake up till she was being handed down from the gig at the side-door of a great big, grey house with many windows—handed down into the arms of a stout woman in black, with a very red face.

"So this is the child," she said, as she deposited her on the flags beside her, and turned round and looked her over. "She is not a Rivers, anyhow," in a tone of contemptuous deprecation.

"No, and maybe that's no loss," returned Mr. Meadows, indignantly; "and she's a bony girl, anyway. No one can deny that."

"Well, well, we will not fall out about her looks," said the other. "Come in, Mrs. Meadows, and have a bit of dinner and something warm to drink after your long drive, and you too, farmer. If you'll just drive into the yard, there's a man will take the horse. The family is away now—not coming home this while."

The invitation was declined at first; but after very pressing entreaties and some whispering between the farmer and his wife, they descended and had dinner in the housekeeper's room.

Missy noticed that Mrs. Taff, the housekeeper, drank a great deal of yellow stuff out of a bottle, and laughed a great deal, and seemed very good-humoured as dinner went on. She sat on "mam's" knee, with her kitten hugged in her arms, and refused to eat.

She felt that something was going to happen, and was resolved that she would not stay in this big house with the woman with the red face.

No, no, she would not let "mam's" out of her sight; where she went Missy went. After a time the farmer and his wife were taken round to see the state rooms—the banqueting-hall, the picture gallery, the big yellow saloon—and Mrs. Taff became loquacious and confidential and even affectionate, to Mrs. Meadows. She imparted that the eldest of them, meaning Miss Rivers, "was going, they said, to be married—but she would believe it when she saw it."

"No," in answer to a query that Missy did not hear, although she clung like a limpet to mam's hand, "no picture of her anywhere."

Then there was a long whispered talk in a window, and "mam's" cried a great deal, and seemed to be urging something on the housekeeper, who looked at Missy very sharply and said "Yes," and then farmer Meadows looked at his watch, a big silver one, the size of a turnip, and said,—

"Mary, we must be going. But get it over sharp, and in a few moments the gig was at the side door with him in it; then his wife turned to take leave of her foster child,—

"Good-by, my blessed!" she said, "when you're a grand young lady you won't forget your old mam's, and when you can write a letter you'll write to her I'm sure. Be a good girl, my treasure, and Heaven keep you!"

"No, no! I'm going too!" she screamed, clasping both hands tightly round her neck. "I'll not stay here. I'll go too! Oh! don't—don't leave me!"

But her tears and prayers availed nothing.

"Come along, Mary—come along. You must, you know," said her husband, impatiently (with all a man's horror of a cecene): and in the end she was torn away by main force from her beloved mam's neck, by Mrs. Taff's vigorous arms and held back, whilst she got into the dog cart and was rapidly driven away, and then she was let go.

In one second she darted after them like the wind, her hands outstretched, her hair streaming; but, needless to say, that though they saw the little figure in pursuit they drove remorselessly on, and she gave up the chase when she could run no further, and flung herself down on the wet hard gravel, and gave way to a passion of tears and despair.

In the end someone came and fetched her, not Mrs. Taff, but a good-humoured girl called Phoebe, who dragged her in by one arm, nearly pulling it out of its socket, and pushing her into Mrs. Taff's sanctum, said,—

"There she is! She is a regular little wild cat."

"Wild cat or not, she's to sleep with you, Phoebe," returned Mrs. Taff, with a loud laugh, "and I make no doubt that we will soon tame her. Give her some bread and butter and take her upstairs."

But she declined to eat even bread-and-butter and sugar, and having been undressed and put in Phoebe's bed in a very shabby little room, she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

MANY and many a night Pauline repeated the same thing, and cried herself to sleep, and had good reason to.

What a sad change had befallen her! No longer the baby of the family, the pet of the household. She was "nobody's child," and left to shift entirely for herself. It was no one's business to look after her.

They saw that she came in to meals in the housekeeper's room, and Phoebe now and then brushed her hair and fastened her frock, but she was left entirely to her own devices.

Mrs. Taff could not and would not be bothered. Miss Rivers left no directions, except that she was to be taken in.

And Phoebe had a sweetheart who occupied most of her time.

Grant, the gardener, was as cross as two sticks, and always slammed the big gate in the child's face if he saw her coming near to his domains.

Jane, the cook, *pro tem*, (kitchen-maid when the house was full) was kind to her, and let her go with her to milk the cows, and sit beside the hearth on a little creasy stool in the kitchen; and Tom, the cowboy, was another ally; so she gradually descended from the servants' hall and found her level in the kitchen, and in the end spent most of her time in that apartment.

Once or twice Mrs. Taff had said,—

"Send that child out of the kitchen; she has no business there," but after a while she was allowed to remain unnoticed.

She was out of the way, no trouble, and was welcome; so she spent all her time indoors with Jane, generally sitting close to the big fireplace, on a low three-legged stool, nursing a grimy kitten; and Phoebe one day, in a sudden burst of good-humour dubbed her "Cinderella."

The name fitted her exactly, and was adopted by the household as an excellent joke, and remained her nickname for many a long year.

She knew the story. She had heard it in those happier times when she sat on Farmer Meadows's knee, and she was quite proud of being called "Cinderella."

Did not the fairy godmother come in a coach and six, and take her away in great splendour? Why should she not have a fairy godmother, too?

She threw out a few hints on this subject to Phoebe, who laughed immoderately at the idea.

"Bless us and save us!" she exclaimed, with her hands upon her hips, "what next! Why, child, you have no belongings—no more than the pump in the yard; no one even knows the name of your mother's people. The sooner you get such foolish ideas out of that head of yours the better. You'll be Cinderella all your life. Just look at the holes in your frock! and my goodness gracious I did one ever see the like! You're more like a little beggar than anything else that you are!"

All the same, she never volunteered to mend any of the yawning rents which the child had got in running wild through the woods with Tom, the cow-boy.

Her very, very respectable wardrobe, which had been put together by Mrs. Meadows's careful, clever fingers, more nearly resembled the property of a scarecrow than anything else, but she had been little more than a year at Mount Rivers, and it had never been replenished.

It was the second summer after her arrival there when her two sisters, a train of servants, and many visitors came down.

She was now nearly eight years old, and a veritable wild, unkempt, neglected child.

Mrs. Taff's addicted to the yellow bottle reduced her to a state of chronic somnolence when the house was empty.

Phoebe was idle, lazy, and a great flirt, and did not consider that she had been hired as nurse-maid; so she told Jane, in Pauline's hearing, with a toss of her head.

But Jane was her friend. Jane cobbled up her frocks, and patched and let them down, but her efforts made matters but little better.

She was, as she said herself, but a poor hand with the needle; and Jane took her with her to

church on Sunday evenings—in fact, Jane was her patroness and I am afraid she had a very unpromising-looking client.

There was great bustle previous to the arrival of the Misses Rivers and their guests. Rooms, long, unopened, were swept and dusted, covers taken off the furniture, and in some cases walls scoured.

The garden walks were all raked, quantities of flowers and fruit sent in by the surly Grant, but no thought of making Pauline presentable occurred to anyone's mind.

She returned one afternoon late from nutting in the woods in a deplorable state of tatters, her locks laying loose over her shoulders, her straw hat with half the crown unsewn, her bare arms and hands and face burnt to a rich mahogany, and was caught in this condition by a very smart lady's maid, whom she had, of course, never seen before, and who hustled her up, just as she was, to her sisters' dressing-room.

There she found a high-nosed old lady in gold spectacles, Lady Augusta, and her two sisters, already dressed for dinner.

There was a roaring, huge fire in the chimney for the room was large and had been long unoccupied.

Close to it sat Matilda, in pale blue satin, cut square, and trimmed with white satin. She could scarcely take her eyes off this garment as she was ushered into the room.

"Good gracious!" screamed Matilda, half rising, "what is this! You don't mean to say that this awful-looking object is Pauline?"

"So it seems," said Lady Augusta, scrutinizing her through her spectacles; "a regular little street arab."

"She has been allowed to run wild," exclaimed Carrie, indignantly.

"It's scandalous, Matilda! Quite disgraceful. You should speak about it."

"All very well to talk, miss," put in the maid, "but Mrs. Taft do say there ain't doing nothing with her. She's like a wild Indian, and won't wear good clothes, but tears everything to tatters, and is just a little savage."

"I'm sure she looks it," agreed Matilda, glaring at her step-sister. "What's to be done! Suppose any one was to see her?" with a face of horror.

"Oh, there's no fear of that, miss. She lives in the kitchen," returned Mrs. Taft's ally.

"She ought to be looked after—to have a maid," said Lady Augusta, decisively. "It's not respectable."

"Yes, that's all very fine," returned her eldest niece; "but who is to do it? We have only brought just as many servants as we want. They have all plenty to do without looking after this young orang-outang. It will be best to leave her alone for the present, and after I'm married she shall go to some school. Here Martin," to her maid, "take her away; don't let her come near me, and don't let us see her again. She's a perfect little horror. Keep her out of sight, whatever you do."

And thus she was dismissed, and went downstairs with a bursting heart, but too proud to cry, clenching her small hands with the effort to keep back her tears.

Now that there was a tribe of servants in the kitchen, and Jane was dethroned there, she had no sanctuary.

She dared not be seen upon the stairs nor in any public part of the house. She lived mostly out-of-doors, creeping up to bed at dusk, like a stealthy little thief.

There was a great deal of gay company; ladies in lovely dresses playing archery or croquet on the lawn; riding, driving, and picnic parties; dinners and dances all pressed into a week or ten days, many besides coming and going, and great trunks full of dresses for the wedding from London.

Pauline saw and knew all these things from her post in the background. She saw grand dinners being served up, with roast and game, and fish, and soups, and sweets, and ices; whilst she was despatched to bed with a bone and a crust!

Now and then she was allowed to run messages downstairs from the housekeeper's room to the larder or kitchen, and to carry parcels, &c.

She was glad of the chance; it was better than roaming about the plantations alone, for Tom was too busy to play with her nowadays.

Occasionally she met her elder sister (she had ordered her rags to be mended), and she was not so deplorable an object, though her frock was sadly faded and patched.

Matilda managed house as before, and kept Mrs. Taft to her work, and in terror, but one afternoon was off her guard, and she received an unexpected order to get out some very valuable old Dresden china ornaments for the table, and was not in a condition to comply with this demand.

She was not in a condition to move such delicate and valuable things, but all the same she mounted a chair in the store closet, and handed them down one by one to Phoebe, and Phoebe left with her arms full, whilst Pauline stood holding the chair, to keep it steady.

At this moment Mrs. Taft took out the centre-piece—a kind of candelabra—and letting it slip, tried to recover it—in vain. Indeed, she gave a scream of dismay as it fell on the stone floor, and was smashed into a hundred pieces.

Hearing Matilda's voice coming down the passage, she turned to Pauline with a hoarse voice, and said,—

"I'll say you did it."

Before she had time to expostulate Matilda was in the doorway, her face in a blaze, her eyes rivetted on the fragments. She was too angry to speak, and Mrs. Taft, from the chair above, just pointed one finger at her scapegoat.

In a second Matilda seized her by the shoulder, her hard fingers pressed into her unprotected neck, and with the other hand she hit the child hard with the palm hard on the cheek, and, not content with this, snatched up a yard measure that lay close to her hand, and laid it about her hands, and arms, and neck in a kind of blind fury, exclaiming as she did so,—

"Two hundred pounds' worth of china! Two hundred pounds' worth of china! Oh, you hateful little wretch! You did it on purpose!"

More blows. Pauline did not speak, she did not even cry out whilst she acted as whipping-girl for Mrs. Taft, who still stood upon the chair, as if petrified at the catastrophe.

At length her sister's arm was tired, and pushing her violently from her, she thrust her out of the room, saying,—

"Begone, don't let me see you again!"

And she, only too glad to escape, too proud to exculpate herself, fled along a passage downstairs and headlong out of the house, to an old summer-house in the pleasure ground, tenanted by nothing but bats, and ants and spiders.

Leaving her throbbing head on her wealed and blistered hands she wept and sobbed as if her little heart would break.

She wept and sobbed for a long time, and regardless of neighbouring ears. There was no one to hear her but the birds; no human being ever came into this part of the pleasure ground called "the wilderness," but to-day was the exception that proved the rule.

Suddenly she was aware that the door was darkened, and, looking up, beheld two gentlemen, a middle-aged man, with a nice kind face, and a youth, in fact, little more than a boy, who were gazing at her with an unmistakable curiosity.

"What is the matter, child?" said the old gentleman, as she called him to herself, though he was not really more than forty; "what are you crying for? Tell me."

She maintained a dead silence, and gazed at him in amazement as she tried in vain to stifle her long drawn sobs.

"Is it this?" said the boy, pointing to her face, which burned painfully, and showed the mark of five fingers imprinted on her cheek.

"More likely that," returned the other.

"Look at her hands and arms all bruised and in red weals. Some one has been beating her. She looks half wild," in a low voice. "Come," he added, sitting down beside her and speaking in a different tone, "what have you been doing to get yourself into such trouble, eh? Tell me all about yourself. What scrape have you been in?"

"None; I did nothing," she sobbed out at last.

"Oh, I say! come now," expostulated the boy, reproachfully.

"It was Mrs. Taft, the housekeeper. She dropped the china candlesticks, and said, 'I'll say it was you,' she burst out, passionately; 'and then Matilda came in, and said it cost two hundred pounds, and she beat me hard over the head, and neck, and arms—see,' pushing up her poor bruised bare shoulder; 'but it wasn't me; it was Mrs. Taft. She's a wicked—wicked woman.'"

"And who is Matilda?" inquired the two newcomers, in a breath.

"Matilda is Miss Rivers, my sister," she blurted out.

"What!" cried the elderly gentleman, "what do you mean, my good child? What is your name—what are you called?" putting his hand under her chin, and holding up her face.

"I'm called Cinderella," she returned, quickly, interpreting the dubious glances cast upon her shabby frock and poor, ill-cared for appearance; "but my real name is Pauline Rivers."

She was glib enough, you see; being brought up in the society of her elders had given her a bold and ready tongue.

By this time a number of people were assembled on the grass outside, and a silvery, feminine voice was heard calling out,—

"Lord Rockfort, Lord Rockfort, what are you doing in that dismal old place? Whom have you got hold of?"

The owner of this dulcet tone was Carrie, her step-sister, and presently his lordship emerged, leading her by the hand, a sorry spectacle, with tangled hair, battered hat, patched frock, broken boots, weals on her hands, and the marks of tears and a blow on her face.

"I have got hold of a young lady," he returned, standing on the steps, and addressing Carrie and the assembled gaping crowd, "of a young lady, Miss Rivers, who calls herself Cinderella, and who tells me that she is your youngest sister."

Here a loud titter ran round among the assembled ladies, who evidently thought the whole thing was a joke got up for their amusement, and were quite ready to be easily pleased.

A dead silence ensued, and Lord Rockfort said,—

"Is she really your sister, Miss Rivers?" addressing himself to Matilda, who had joined the party, and was surveying the scene with livid face and lurid gaze.

"She is our half-sister—half-witted," returned Carrie, the most ready in this terrible emergency. "Please, don't mind her; let her be sent away. Here, come with me," approaching quickly, and holding out her hand, as if, she were half afraid the child would bite her.

"I won't go with you; you are as bad as Matilda," she returned, shrinking back. "I'm not half-witted, although I do live in the kitchen."

In the end she consented to be led away by Lord Rockfort, who had been her discoverer. He put a few pointed questions to her as he took her to Jane—questions that she answered as frankly as she could. How long she had been at Mount Rivers, who taught her how old she was?

Unfortunately for Matilda he took a very unfattering view of her conduct. A stormy scene ensued between them, prevarication and generalities were useless against plain facts; and the upshot of it all was that, thanks to Pauline's untimely appearance, the match was broken off, as Lord Rockfort positively declined to ally himself with Cinderella's sister.

He had had a glimpse behind the scenes just in time, and beat a hasty retreat from the matrimonial paradise in store for him.

It can easily be imagined that Pauline was less popular than ever after this awful catastrophe. She was kept up in her own room a prisoner until a fitting wardrobe was prepared for her, and then she was despatched to a school, that

placed nearly the whole length of England between her and Mount Rivers.

CHAPTER V.

PAULINE was sent to school, as we have already remarked, a long, long journey, all alone, second-class, under charge of the guard, with a card with her name and address sewn on her jacket, just as if she was a parcel by goods' train. She travelled from seven in the morning till seven at night, was transferred into a branch line, which, after another hour's journey, brought her to a small country town. Here she was met by a porter who had been on the look-out for her, and who shouldered her box and gruffly bade her follow him out of the station, which she did, though nearly ready to drop with fatigue and hunger, for a couple of stale bath buns and a glass of milk had been her only refreshment during the whole day.

For fully half a mile they walked—he in front and she behind—up the principal street, which was on the side of a steep hill, then down, and through a narrow-paved road out into the suburbs between high-walled gardens and fields. At last, to Pauline's great joy, they came to a full stop before some rusty iron gates, and an immense, old-fashioned red brick house, with numbers of tiny windows, and a very steep flight of steps up to the hall door.

They rang, and were admitted into a stone hall, and Pauline into a little parlour, where she found three elderly ladies at tea. They stared very hard at her, as if she were quite some new variety of child; but seeing that she did not bite, and was both tired and hungry, they gave her each a fish-like shake of the hand, and invited her to take off her hat, and have some bread-and-butter and tea.

She nearly fell asleep before the meal was over, and was conducted upstairs—a long way, it seemed near the top of the house—where she was shown a bed, into which she crept the moment she had pulled off her clothes, and instantly was in the arms of Morpheus.

Next morning she was awake by a loudly clanging bell, and a great subsequent noise of talking and squabbling and splashing of water, and, looking about, saw four or five other girls, all a good deal older than herself, up and dressing.

"Here, you new-comer," cried one of them, "get up at once—no lying in bed here, it's six o'clock. Come, out you jump, and let us have a squint at you."

Very reluctantly she slid out of bed, still rubbing her eyes, and stood in the middle of the floor bare-footed in her night dress. The apartment opened into another and much larger dormitory, and a number of girls, half dressed, flocked to the door to join in this inspection of the new arrival.

"Laws! what an ugly little elf!" cried a fat girl, with quantities of curly red hair, and bare, plump white shoulders.

"Grandmother, grandmother, what eyes you have got!" added another, as she stood in the doorway, with brush in hand.

"There, you may get on your clothes," remarked the girl who had called her, "we don't want to see any more of you, you toad-faced little wretch! I suppose you know the nice character you have had sent here by your own sisters!"

"No—and I don't care what they say," she returned, defiantly.

"Oh! no; but perhaps other people do," ironically. "You are said to be a malignant, malicious liar by your own flesh and blood—deceitful and wicked to the last degree—a regular bad lot. That's the reason you have been put among us big girls, because Miss Jones does not want you to poison the minds of the younger children; and we will keep you in order, Miss Sapphira! None of your lies or deceitful ways with us."

"My name is not Sapphira," she cried, with blazing eyes, for she had a good knowledge of the Bible if of nothing else, "and I don't tell lies, but my sisters do."

"Oh, of course," sarcastically. "And pray what is your name, spitfire?"

"My name is Pauline."

"Pauline! My. How fine! And what did they call you for short? Polly?"

"No. I was always called something else."

"Something else? Well, what was it? Come don't be all day about telling us, and you'd better look sharp, for if you are not in the schoolroom when the bell goes you get no breakfast!"

"They called me Cinderella," she returned, boldly, unabashed by much derisive giggling, and then commenced her toilet. And, strange to say, by that name she was always known at school, and she was there for no less than nine years. Sometimes it was abbreviated to "Cindy," sometimes Nellie, and she was still Cindy or Cinderella Rivers when she was quite grown-up and went into long dresses.

The school she was sent to was very large, very cheap, and by no means select. There were sixty girls, from ten to eighteen years of age. They were fed and housed and taught for thirty-five pounds a year, so I need scarcely mention that the board and accommodation was of the least luxurious description.

The schoolroom was a huge apartment, looking out on the yard. It had four bare, narrow tables running down the middle, and desks all round. Here they lived, ate their frugal meals, and learnt their lessons. One of the Misses Jones presided over their mental, or as the case might be, physical food, at the end of three tables; and the French governess, a little sallow woman, with a knitted covering on her head, at the other. The food was simply vile—stale bread and dripping—hot water and milk for breakfast, and dinners it would be hard indeed to say of what kind of meat. It was generally a miscellaneous stew, and Pauline often heard the big girls hint that it was most likely the remains of some animal who had died a natural death. They were always delighted when the dinner consisted of huge piled dishes of boiled cockles, for they knew then what they were eating, which was of itself a rare treat.

Very often they were very hungry, and those girls who had pocket-money carried on a traffic with the day-scholars for buns, oranges, tarts and meat pies. Those were the lucky girls who had money—pocket-money. Cinderella never had a farthing, never had a letter, never went home for the holidays. In time she lived down her bad reputation. She was quick and bright at lessons, and made rapid strides, for she liked learning, and was ashamed to feel her deplorable ignorance.

A great girl of eight, who could neither read nor write, was an object of wonder and contempt to her school-fellows. They went for hateful walks two-and-two every day, and always the same road, always the same distance. Some of the elder girls, among whom she still herded, were wont to find little three-cornered notes under stones and leave others in their places. They had too much liberty. One Miss Jones out walking had not sufficient eye-power to look after sixty girls. These big girls, too, had grand supper parties in their own room, at which she assisted, more as an humble retainer than a guest. Cinderella washed the tooth tumblers, fetched water, &c., and was suffered to seat herself at the edge of the cloth spread on the floor (N.B. a sheet), and partake of the least choice of the delicacies before her company.

"Has anyone seen the little grey man this time?" said Fanny Gibbs, the red-haired girl, at one of these convivial meetings, as she glanced round the table, glass in hand.

"No, no one yet," returned Amelia Stocker, the lanky dark girl who had ordered Cinderella out of bed the first morning.

"I don't believe there's any such person," said Fanny, "it's all rubbish and nonsense; and, anyway, it's a very odd thing that I've never seen him."

"Don't shout till you are out of the wood," cried her *vis-à-vis*.

"No, I won't; and, anyway, here's his very good health," quaffing off her raspberry vinegar.

"Here, Lottie, I see you are waiting for the tumbler—(to another); mind you drink his health too."

"Indeed, I'll do nothing of the sort," turning a little pale. "If you had seen him as I have, you would not be so polite to him," shaking her head.

"Who is he? When did you see him? What is he like?" inquired Cinderella, breathlessly.

"Listen to her little petition," said Fanny, derisively. "Does not Cindy Rivers know about the little grey man, and all the queer people in this hateful old house?"

"No, she does not," put in another, "and what's the use of telling her. Anyway," looking at her, contemptuously, "little people should be seen and not heard," and then they changed the subject.

But Cinderella was on her mettle to find out the mystery, and soon was told many strange things by means of her friend, Letty Thompson, who slept in the lower dormitory.

This old house was let to the Miss Jones's for a mere song.

It was the family mansion of a line now nearly extinct.

The last male heir had been lost in an Arctic expedition, and two maiden ladies who owned it preferred to live in London to this out-of-the-way country town.

Besides, it was a huge place, and would take tribes of servants to keep it in order, and it had no land about it to make it worth anyone's while to occupy as a country place.

There was only a great long wilderness of a garden at the back, to which you went by a tunnel under the yard.

Near the gate there were rows of potatoes planted and some broad beans.

The walks were made of coal-dust, and made the place look gloomier than ever; then, beyond this, the only cultivated place, was a great wilderness, a mass of high grass, high box, old apple-trees, gooseberry and currant bushes, all lashed together by "Robin round the hedge," and everywhere weeds, gigantic weeds.

No one, not the most adventurous, ever penetrated more than a few yards—the region had a bad name.

Besides this there were two large yards, the outer full of tumble-down stabling; the inner, a series of rooms like offices and chambers, dreary and dark.

The girls used to try and play hide-and-seek among them, but the cobwebs, the broken flooring, and the dust were too overpowering.

No one could tell what they had been used for, but there was accommodation in them for at least fifty servants.

The house itself was full of long passages, sharp corners, narrow dark stairs, and rooms in the most unexpected places, the very most proper and suitable home for ghosts.

The top story was held to be the place where they chiefly walked, and the girls said it was a very odd thing the Miss Jones's slept *all* on the first floor themselves, left the second to the young children and Mademoiselle, and the third to the big girls *alone*.

The servants slept below in the basement, flatly refusing to sleep elsewhere.

Cinderella discovered that she was greatly in request to run messages upstairs in the dusk. "Ignorance was bliss" in her case and she being good-natured was proud and pleased to do the big girls' errands, but after she knew more she remembered how every face in the room would be fixed on her with an expression of nervous expectancy as she returned from her mission.

One night Fanny went downstairs after they had retired to their rooms to borrow a novel from a girl in the second floor. Fanny read in bed, burning her own candles. It's a mercy that they were not all burnt alive, for she was most careless, and the old wood was like tinder.

After a time, her companions heard her coming down the passage—then a smothered shriek—then a rush and a beating of her hands on the door. It was quickly opened, and she fell into the room in a dead faint.

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

HE (conceited): "Yes, I know two men I thoroughly admire." SHE: "Indeed. Who's the other one?"

GRANDMA: "Bobby, what are you doing in the pantry?" Bobby: "Oh, I'm just putting a few things away, grandma."

VERBALLY: "How did you like my last book of poems?" Mrs. McGinnis: "I laid it aside with great pleasure."

PEOPLE never know how much may be said on both sides until they hear two women talking over a garden wall.

CATTLE are dumb animals, but by gathering themselves together they can make themselves herd.

WAITER: "The usual steak, sah?" Regular Customer: "No, I am tired to-night. Bring me a plate of hash."

"And do you ever invite your poor relations to visit you?" "Oh, yes, indeed. You see, they are all too poor to get here."

"Why weren't you asked to the Van Noodle reception?" "Mrs. Van Noodle said my complexion would clash with the new wall paper."

DAUGHTER: "Papa went off in great good humour this morning." Mother: "My goodness. That reminds me. I forgot to ask him for any money."

MOTHER: "So you wish my daughter for your wife?" He (gallantly): "Partly that, madam, and partly that you might be my own mother-in-law."

CHOLLY: "Why did you discha' your man?" Algy: "He was too ignowant. Whenever I was writing a lettah and wanted to know how to spell a word, he had to look in a dictionary."

"WELL, friends," said a Scottish clergyman, recently, "the kirk is urgently in need of siller, and as we have failed to get money honestly, we will have to see what a bazaar can do for us."

OFFICE BOY (to Butcher): "Mr. Serial wants sixpenny worth of sliced ham wrapped up in the continuation of the story you sent him yesterday with the sausages."

YOUNG ARTIST: "It's an outrage to have such an ignoramus as Puffers on a hanging committee." Friend: "No judge of art, eh?" Young Artist: "He is a half-idiot. Why, sir, he thought my cows were horses."

NEW GIRL (timidly): "I s'pose you are a fine cock, mum?" Young Mistress: "Bless me, no; I don't know a thing about it." New Girl (relieved): "Then we'll get on famous, mum. I don't either."

JOHNSON made quite a hit when he made his first appearance on the stage. "What was his part?" "The ghost in *Hamlet*." He appeared five minutes ahead of time, and the effect on *Hamlet* was very fine."

"It isn't getting into trouble that's hard," said the philosophical young man, "it's getting out of it." "Yes," replied Willie Washington, "I think of that every time I try to weepose in a hammock."

DINKY: "I received a letter from your brother Jack this morning." Mrs. Dinks: "Ah, one of his dear old characteristic letters, I'll be bound." Dinky: "Yes; wanted to know if I couldn't let him have five pounds for a month or so."

"Does your artist friend paint portraits true to life?" "He did at first, but he has learned better." "Indeed?" "Yes; the first two or three commissions he executed were so true to life that the sitters refused to take the pictures."

ANXIOUS MOTHER: "My dear, I am afraid that young man you are engaged to will not make a good husband. He seems very hard to please." Pretty Daughter: "Hard to please? I should say he was. He never even thought of marrying anybody until he met me."

"What do yer think of the income tax?" asked Plodding Pete. "I ain't got no objections to it," replied Meandering Mike. "Only it does seem ter me that the Government might go the whole length or the string, an pervide every man with an income ter fit it."

WIFE: "Do newspaper writers sit up all night?" Husband: "I believe so." "That explains it, then." "Explains what?" "The household department of this paper recommends roast potatoes for breakfast. One would have to sit up all night to have the oven hot enough."

SHE: "You know, Reggie, that girls are being called by the names of flowers now, and my sister suggested that I should be called Thistle." Reggie: "Oh, yes, I see; because you are so sharp." She: "Oh, no; she said it was because a donkey loved me."

"Don't talk about life insurance companies to me," said Mrs. Waggles, indignantly. "They aren't any good. Why, when my poor husband lay a-dyin' I sent word to the Profitable Assurance Company to come up and insure his life right away, and, do you know the wretches wouldn't do it."

"Don't you like Professor Knowall?" asked one girl. "Oh, dear no!" replied the other girl, "he's so fatiguing." "He has the reputation of being very clever." "That's why I don't like him. When he talks you have to listen to what he is saying, or you can't reply to his remarks."

A LADY visitor, calling on an old man who was ill, asked him a great many questions. The old man, getting very tired, said: "I wish I had plenty of money and nothing to do." The lady visitor sharply said: "And what would you do then?" "Why, I'd go about and mind other people's business," was the cutting reply.

THE doctor, it would seem, is not in high repute with Paddy. A man in Limerick went to the undertaker to order a coffin for Mike Connell. "Dear me," said the undertaker, "is poor Mike dead?" "No, he's not dead yet," answered the other; "but he'll die to-night, for the doctor says he can't live till morning, and he knows what he gave him."

"Wow! MURDER!" said the young lady from New York to her beautiful Boston friend. "Great goodness, Clara, what are you standing there like a mummy for when there's a mouse right under you?" "Hush!" said Clara, calming herself by a great effort. "I am trying to recollect what one of Ibsen's heroines would have done in a similar emergency."

IN a certain town in the North of England a countryman had occasion to travel by tram to the next town, a distance of about six miles. He was on the point of getting inside the tram when the conductor remarked: "Full up inside, sir; there's plenty of room on the top." Whereupon the countryman said, "O! knew all abawt that, but does top go same place?"

"What a careless girl Margaret is!" said Mrs. Mann to her husband the other evening. "She had a pitcher of water in her hand, the mate to this one, and when she went to throw out the water she threw pitcher and all, this way, and—"

MAUDE: "That Mr. Touchstone has no manners whatever. Last night at the literary soiree, when Miss Gilton had been talking beautifully about Dante's works for half-an-hour, he interrupted her to ask what were the names of Dante's works." Ellen: "Well!" Maude: "And before that he had hidden the biographical dictionary, so that none of us could find out."

NOT long since a certain noble peer in Yorkshire, who is fond of boasting of his Norman descent, thus addressed one of his tenants, who, he thought, was not speaking to him with proper respect: "Do you know that my ancestors came over with William the Conqueror?" "And mayhap," replied the sturdy Saxon, nothing daunted, "they found mine here when they came." The noble felt he had the worst of it.

AN old Scotch lady, who had no relish for modern church music, was expressing her dislike on the singing of an anthem in her own church one day, when a neighbour said: "Why, that is a very old anthem! David sang that anthem to Saul." To this the old lady replied: "Weel, weel! I noo for the first time understand why Saul threw his javelin at David when the lad sang for him."

"MY MAN," said the woman, who was leaning across the fence, "is one of these here pessimists." "And what's that?" asked the other woman. "Why, one of these here fellows that is always sure bad luck is coming to him, and is mightily surprised when it comes."

PRUDENCE is one of the virtues that naturally go with age, but sometimes it is developed early. "Tommy," said a thoughtful mother, "your Uncle William will be here to-day, and you must wash your face." "Yes, ma," said the thrifty Thomas; "but s'posen he don't come! What then?"

MRS. GADDERS: "I have so much trouble keeping a cook. I can't get one that will stay more than a week." Mrs. Sauers (loftily): "My family is just the same size as yours, and I have no trouble." Mrs. Gadders: "Yes; I've heard that your cook had an easy thing of it. She told my chambermaid that she had hardly anything to do except when company came."

A WELL-KNOWN tragedian once played *Hamlet* at Paisley. Being a special occasion, the prices were raised, and the admission to the threepenny gallery was made sixpence. Two old weavers were afterwards heard discussing the merits of the performance. "What kin' o' job dae ye think that chiel made o' *Hamlet*, Jamie?" inquired one. "No bad—no bad awa; but it's no a saxpenny *Hamlet* for a' that, Willie."

"Did you ever see a play, Aunt Martha?" asked a lady of an elderly aunt from the country, who was spending a week in the city. "Yes, Anne, I did," was the reply. "When your uncle and me was married, we come to the city on our bridal tower, and we went to see one of Mr. Shakespeare's pieces called 'How Do You Like It?' and I didn't like it a bit, and I ain't been since."

"LITTLE Tommy didn't disobey mamma and go in swimming, did he?" "No, mamma; Jimmy Brown and the rest of the boys went in, but I remembered what you said, and didn't disobey you." "And Tommy never tells stories, does he?" "No, never; I wouldn't tell a story for all the world." "Then how does Tommy happen to have on Jimmy Brown's shirt?" That conundrum was too much for Tommy; he had to give it up.

HIS HONOUR: "Then you swear that you were not intoxicated?" Prisoner: "I do, your honour." HIS HONOUR: "Will you state to the Court why you persist in asserting you were not drunk when the testimony of the officer who arrested you distinctly contradicts you?" Prisoner: "Your honour, I was able to consult Bradshaw and find out the time of departure of a friend's train." HIS HONOUR: "The prisoner is discharged."

A MAN with a wife who has her own ways about doing things catches her now and then. "My dear," he said the other morning as he was dressing, "I think you were right when you told me last night that there were burglars in the house." "Why?" she asked, nervously. "Because all the money that was in my pockets when I went to bed is gone." "Well," she said, with an I-told-you-so air, "if you had been brave and got up and shot the wretch, you would have had your money this morning." "Possibly, my dear, possibly," he said, gingerly; "but I should have been a widower." She laughed softly then, and gave half of it back to him.

A SHORT time ago a boy ran away from home, and his parents, being too poor to go after him, asked the rector's assistance who, after considerable trouble, found him, and in his efforts to persuade him to return, quoted the parable of the Prodigal Son—how his father fell on his neck and wept, and afterwards killed the fatted calf. "Do you think my father will kill the fatted calf for me?" asked the boy. "Of course he will, if you will but go home," answered the rector. The lad thereupon decided to return. A few days afterwards the two met. "Well," said the rector, "did your father fall on your neck and weep?" "No, I don't think he wept," answered the boy. "Did he kill the fatted calf?" "No, he didn't," was the reply; "but he very nearly killed the prodigal son."

SOCIETY.

THIS year was the first time since 1860 that the Court has been in residence at Windsor during Ascot race week.

THE Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha will give a garden party early in this month at Clarence House, at which the Queen will probably be present, together with the Imperial and Royal visitors then in England.

THIS year the record of weddings during the supposed unlucky month of May was even slenderer than usual, although it was recently stated that the number of engagements in fashionable circles was unusually large this spring.

THE Duke of York received the honorary degree of D.C.L. at Cambridge on the 27th of June, and the Prince and Princess of Wales and several other members of the Royal Family were present at the function, over which the Duke of Devonshire (as Chancellor of the University) presided.

THE children of the Crown Prince of Denmark can claim Napoleon's old general, Bernadotte, as an ancestor if they wish to, as their mother is a Swedish Princess, a niece of the present King Oscar. Had it not been for the Salic law, she might have been Queen of Sweden in her own right.

A JAPANESE fan, made of split bamboo, and covered with paper, is now being sold as an aid to ladies suffering from defective hearing and who shrink from the use of an ear-trumpet. It must be held with the upper edge of the spread fan against the teeth, with the fan bent sufficiently to give the bamboo rods tension.

THE Grand Duke and Duchess Serge will proceed from London to Darmstadt, accompanied by Princess Alix of Hesse, who is to return with them to Russia. They will all attend the wedding of the Grand Duchess Xenie and the Grand Duke Alexander Michailovitch, which is to take place at Peterhof early in August; and then Princess Alix will go with her sister to the castle of Ilimskoe, near Moscow, where she is to reside until the beginning of November.

THE Prince of Wales and the Duke of Coburg wore a new order at the State Ball and the other functions of last month. This decoration consisted of a broad blue ribbon, with an elephant in ivory suspended from it. This is the Danish Order of the Elephant, which the Princes wore as a compliment to Prince Christian. The Elephant is the first Order in Denmark, and dates from 1462.

It is not generally known that our Queen's daughters, in addition to being excellent needlewomen, are also good cooks. When they were children they had a little kitchen of their own at Osborne, where they concocted all kinds of dishes, sweets being naturally the favourites. Here they converted into jam fruit out of their own gardens, and turned out many a savoury dish for the delectation of their brothers, all of whom had as excellent appetites as generally appertain to boys. At least one of the Princesses still continues to cook an occasional little *plat*, and has been heard to say that she would have made an excellent *chef*.

It is said that the Duke of York is desirous of re-entering the navy, and that an appointment will shortly be found for him; but there are several reasons why it is improbable that the Duke will be absent for any considerable period. His position as Heir-presumptive to the Throne would alone prevent him from undertaking any voyage in which there was any risk, and there is also the fact that every succeeding year the Prince and Princess of Wales will look more and more to the Duke and Duchess to share with them their many public duties. A third reason is that the Duke is not robust enough for a seafaring life, his attack of typhoid having left him less strong than was formerly the case; so that if his Royal Highness should resume naval duties, they will be probably only of the most nominal kind.

STATISTICS.

BUT one person in fifteen has perfect eyes.

A RACEHORSE clears from 20 to 21 feet at a bound.

THE world's supply of diamonds is twenty times greater than it was thirty years ago.

THE average income of the members of the House of Commons is said to be about £2,000.

HOSPITAL statistics prove that amputation is four times as dangerous after the age of 50 as before.

THE chimneys of our ocean steamers are much larger than is generally supposed. They range from fourteen feet to eighteen feet in diameter.

THE greatest average height in any European army is found in the Norwegian, sixty-nine inches; the least in the Italian, sixty-five.

RECENT statistics show that about half the population of France live by agriculture, a tenth by trade, a twenty-fifth by liberal professions, and three-fiftieths on private incomes.

GEMS.

WHEN a noted man is very ill a great many persons call at his residence and leave their names, not as evidence of good faith, but for publication.

THE best way to prove the clearness of our mind is by showing its faults; as when a stream discovers the dirt at the bottom, it convinces us of the transparency of the water.

THE best equipment for well-doing is in the experience gained from having done well before. The reward of one duty is the power to fulfil another.

NOT in any condition but in thyself lies the mean impediment over which thou canst not gain the mastery. What mortal in the world without inward calling but would be miserable? He who is born with capacities for any undertakings finds in fulfilling these the fairest portion of his being. It is the secret impulse within; it is the love and delight we feel that helps us to conquer obstacles, to clear out new paths, and to overleap the bounds of that narrow circle in which others poorly toil.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

OATCAKES.—For setting, put a little dripping and a pinch of baking soda among your oatmeal. Knead them out quickly; use warm but not hot water, and rub with plenty of dry meal to make them white.

PRESERVE AND CUSTARD.—A plain custard assumes a different aspect if a bit of delicate preserve is put in the bottom of the little custard glasses before filling them. Lay a lady finger, or half a one on top of each.

HOW TO SERVE NEW PEAS.—Tender new peas are appetizingly served in cases. These are made of mashed potatoes stiffened with a little flour, and baked in fluted cake tins, the centre filled with a bit of bread. This is then removed and the peas poured in.

STRAWBERRY ICE.—Three quarts of strawberry juice, with one quart of water. Make this mixture very sweet, for everything loses some of its sweetness in the process of freezing. Then add the whites of six eggs, beaten light, and freeze.

PLUM PUDDING.—For your three pounds of flour to make it rich you require one pound suet, pound and a half currants, pound and a half raisins, half pound orange peel, pound and a half sugar, two lemons rind grated and juice, one teaspoonful baking soda, three eggs, three breakfast cups milk, one nutmeg, three teaspoonfuls of spice; mix all, and put in only as much milk as moistens it all; put it in a large cloth and boil for twelve hours; it may be boiled half the time one day, and half some other day.

MISCELLANEOUS.

MOORISH women never celebrate their birthdays, and few of them know their own ages.

THE Honorary D.C.L. of Oxford is the highest academical degree obtainable.

THE Dakota River is the longest unnavigable river in the world—over 1,000 miles.

NINEVAH was fifteen miles by nine, the walls 100 feet high and thick enough for three chariots to drive abreast.

IN Shakespeare's time the prices of admission to a theatrical performance varied from a penny to a shilling.

THE Irish language is still spoken, to some extent, in the Bahamas, by the descendants of the Hibernians banished to the West Indies by Cromwell.

THE resurrection plant, a native of South Africa, becomes dry and apparently lifeless during drought, but opens its leaves and assumes all appearance of life when rain falls.

AN American glass manufacturer has now begun to make glass brushes, such as are used by china decorators for burnishing the gilding on china after it comes from the kiln.

THE marriage rate of Germany rose 10 per cent. in the year following the Franco-Prussian war. The same phenomenon was observed after the French war, which ended in 1815.

THE arrangement of the trees in Blenheim Park, the seat of the Duke of Marlborough, is said to represent the position of the troops in the great battle which gave the estate its name.

THE Bavarian Government are about to build an enormous drinking hall in Munich, and there dispense a special Government brew at the lowest price, which is to be a standard and model of all other beers in the country.

THE city of Banian, in Great Bucharia, is cut in the side of a mountain. There are 12,000 artificial caves, some very large, and two statues, one ninety, the other twenty feet high, each hewn from a single stone.

THE nails of the Chinese nobility sometimes attain a length of 18 inches, and the Siamese belles wear long silver cases at the ends of their fingers, to protect the nails if they are long enough to need it, or to make people believe that they are there even if they are not.

MAIWATCHIN, on the borders of Russia, is the only city in the world peopled by men only. The Chinese women are not only forbidden to live in this territory, but even to pass the great wall of Kalkan and enter into Mongolia. All the Chinese of this border city are exclusively traders.

POISONOUS snakes are so numerous in Venezuela that snake bite is almost as common there as in India. But there are fewer fatalities, for the natives have discovered that a plant known as the *oumillo*, when powdered and applied to the wound, results in a cure in almost every case.

PAZILLANS train a snake called the *gibola* as a rat-catcher. It is fifteen feet long, is harmless to the human being, becomes quite a household pet, is lazy in the daytime, but at night roams about the house in quest of its prey, the rats. These animals it promptly kills by twisting their necks.

A WRITER says that "Chinese language" is a misnomer. "There is no such thing as a Chinese language, any more than there is a European language. A Canton man cannot understand an Amoy man, and I have seen two Chinamen sitting together with a third one acting as interpreter. Pigeon English is the common tongue of commerce."

FIRE is an essential in some wedding celebrations. In Persia the service is read in front of a fire. In Nicaragua the priest, taking the couple each by the little finger, leads them to an apartment where a fire is lighted, and there instructs the bride in her duties, extinguishing it by way of conclusion. In Japan the women kindle a torch, and the bridegroom lights one from it, the playthings of the wife being burnt then and there.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

G. B.—Cannot say.

IN DISTRESS.—We do not give medical advice.

CHRISTIE.—You are eligible for the Horse Guards.

C. M.—The Strand is in no fewer than five parishes.

VERE.—Purchase a work on the rearing of gold-fish.

ROBERT.—The 12th of April, 1811, was on a Saturday.

WEARY ONE.—Heavy bedclothing often produces sleeplessness.

HONORIA.—Consult the dyers and they will tell you what is best.

G. W.—Dabbling with ointments and lotions is dangerous practice.

INDIGNATION.—You have no right to destroy your neighbour's cats.

A CONSTANT READER.—We do not make any charge for our answers to correspondents.

ONE IN DOUBT.—If you have given a bill you may be compelled to meet it.

ANXIOUS FATHER.—You cannot compel your daughter to go into a "home" or refuge.

DOLLY.—Trade recipes are never given in our correspondence columns.

SAM.—Any of the hospitals will be glad to receive illustrated papers.

B. W. E.—A judge must accept the verdict of the jury on the facts of the case.

TOM.—We should say let him rather seek an employment his strength permits of.

TRIPPER.—It will be difficult to get rooms for two or three days except in a hotel.

JOHN.—The State does not give a single farthing for the support of the Church.

OLD READER.—You should get a book on the subject. Several are published.

CURIOS.—The lemon is wild in Peru and India. It is first mentioned B. C. 350.

LAUNCHLOT.—It is much too intricate a matter to be dealt with here. Obtain counsel's opinion.

D. B.—It is always used in conjunction with inferior dark-coloured flour, and regarded as deleterious.

BRINDA.—The starch is used for stiffening. The amount to use you must learn by experience.

IGNORANT ONE.—London is immeasurably the largest city not only in England but in the whole world.

ADMIRING READER.—It is an offence at law to sell, purchase, or take in pledge a soldier's or seaman's medal.

TIMID BETA.—Cutting for cataract in the eye is not now either a dangerous or painful operation; it is done quickly.

ARTIE.—There must be either damage or malicious mischief alleged in order to constitute a case for the court.

MUCH-TRIED FATHER.—It is quite time he left the parental roof and trusted to his own energy and industry.

CHARLIE.—If you use firearms for any purpose but scaring birds or killing vermin, you must have a gun licence.

NANCY.—We have no knowledge of any receipts which will answer your purpose. The article will probably have to be entirely retained.

BRACEBRIDGE.—You cannot claim compensation, but you can state your case to the Pension Commissioners, Greenwich Hospital.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—You should consult seriously with your parents as to your prospects, instead of soliciting advice from strangers.

DELIA.—We know of none, and believe there is no method that would not be more costly than a new garment.

INQUIRER.—Fourteen clear days must elapse, and then it remains for the sheriff, or sheriffs, to appoint a day for the execution.

PHIL.—Your best course would be to pay a visit to the Emigrants' Information Office, Broadway, Westminster.

JULIE.—If the young man's society is agreeable and his moral character is such that you think him a desirable acquaintance invite him to call again.

WHITNEY.—We should think your stamps are of value, especially if they are not used. You had better consult a dealer who could at once say what they are worth, or advertise them in the *Exchange and Mart*.

ETHEL.—Wash your waxcloth without any soda, and then get a bit of beeswax and put as much turpentine in it as will dissolve it. Put it in a jelly-can at the side of the fire till melted. Then put a little on the clean waxcloth and polish up.

MARTIN.—The landrail or corncock is a brown speckled bird, standing rather higher than the average pigeon (owing to length of leg), but with slimmer body; it flies well, but is seldom seen on the wing, as it "runs" swiftly about among the long grasses and cereals in which it builds.

UNHAPPY WIFE.—If the wife can prove that the furniture in the house belongs to her it cannot be legally taken for taxes owing upon her husband's shop, with which she has no connection.

A BRITON.—The coronation of Queen Victoria took place on 28th June, 1838, in Westminster Abbey; her accession or coronation to the throne occurred on 20th June, when William IV. died.

PUZZLED.—The rule of walking in the streets of London is to keep to the right, and the old-fashioned one of giving the wall-side to a lady is not observed, because impracticable.

TURNCOAT.—A man may alter his name without going through any legal process. It is usual and proper to give notice to persons likely to be interested in him to the effect that he has done so.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—If after sentence evidence is forthcoming that establishes the innocence of the prisoner, sentence will be stayed until inquiry in the circumstances is issued.

PUZZLED COCKNEY.—The tartan originated among the Highlanders as a means of distinguishing the clan or family to which a man belonged, just as Red Indians to this day are distinguished by their personal decorations and war-paint.

BUDOLPH.—Relief from the sting of a bee may be generally obtained by putting salt on the place stung and rubbing it with a wet finger until the salt is entirely dissolved. If not speedily relieved wet the place with spirit of ammonia.

HILDEGARD.—To prevent the hair from growing low upon the forehead brush it back from the temples with a tolerably stiff and penetrating hairbrush. Do this night and morning and whenever convenient before dressing or arranging the hair.

"HAVE YOU A HOME?"

HAVE YOU A HOME?
A dear, precious spot,
Be it a palace,
Or be it a cot?
Have you a home
Where your darling ones dwell
Safe from all danger?
Oh! treasure it well.

HAVE YOU A HOME
Where the hearth is aglow.
Throwing its radiance
Above and below?
A home where your welcome
Is honest and true?
Where the eyes of affection
Are watching for you?

HAVE YOU A HOME
Where your tired feet may rest;
A spot where you sleep
The sweet sleep of the blast?
Treasure it, friend,
Though afar you may roam,
For you'll find in your journeyings
"No place like home."

M. A. K.

GERALD.—No person is allowed to use the name or title of "dentist," or "dental practitioner," or any name, title, &c., implying that he is registered or qualified to practise dentistry, unless he is registered under a penalty of £20.

DREW.—At the public meeting the chairman does not move resolutions, and exercises only a casting vote; at company or society meetings he invariably moves the leading resolution and gives a deliberate vote upon it, having also a casting vote.

NELLIE.—In brushing the hair it is not necessary to use a very hard brush, but it should be penetrating and of a good quality. The loss of hair in young persons is attributed to many causes, but we know of no accepted theory on the subject.

CIVILIAN.—The term "infantry" was first used by the Spaniards, in the wars with the Moors, to designate the bodyguard of a royal prince, or infant. It was later extended to the entire body of foot soldiers, and finally adopted throughout Europe.

RITA.—There would be no harm in speaking to him when you meet him. Indeed, it is very bad form to refuse to speak to anyone. Treat the young man like any ordinary acquaintance, and do not think so much about such things.

MILICENT.—On retiring at night with a liquid made as follows: Borax, two ounces; gum arabic, one dram; add hot water, one quart; stir, and as soon as the ingredients are dissolved, add three tablespoonfuls of strong spirits of camphor.

CECILE.—The Indians were found smoking tobacco when the Spaniards landed in San Domingo in 1492. They grew it for this particular use. The plant, it has been asserted, was known in Asia before the discovery of America, but how authentic the assertion is we cannot say.

SYD.—Milton composed the language of the letters sent by Cromwell to various Powers in remonstrance against the persecutions of the Puritans. As he had by this time lost his sight, he was assisted by Andrew Marvell, among others, in his duties as Secretary to the Council.

ONE IN NEED OF ADVICE.—The usual course is to introduce yourself by letter, and with it a specimen of your abilities; both should be short, as an editor has little time to give to matters out of his ordinary routine.

R. M.—The best "cure" for "gapes" is to dip a feather in turpentine, pass it gently down the gullet of the afflicted bird, give it a half turn and then withdraw it, bringing away the worm-like parasite that adheres to the windpipe of the "chick" and causes it to gape.

RATHER DOUBTFUL.—Any person intending to join such a society should act with caution; ascertaining the character of the man who manages its affairs, and before parting with his money examining a statement of the position of the society.

B. A. O.—You must not be too sensitive to criticism. It is everybody's right to criticise, and even our best friends sometimes criticise us unsparringly. Whatever you have to do, do it to the best of your ability, and let the fault-finders have their own way.

OLD READER.—The climate of New Zealand is excellent, and rather warmer than that of England. The climate of Australia is healthy, but not always agreeable. In summer it is extremely dry, and in winter there is frequently a succession of heavy rains.

O. L. R.—Rub soap on the plate until there is a coating about one-sixteenth of an inch thick, then write or draw what is desired in the soap with a needle or stylus, next apply aquafortis, which does not touch the soap but eats into the plate through the lines made in it; the operation requires skill.

OSWALD.—In England, in the reign of Queen Anne, square cut coats, with ridiculously long waistcoats and huge pockets, long stockings, ugly shoes, square in shape, with red heels, formed the costume of the nobility, while the dresses of the citizens or commoners was of the puritanical order.

CLEM.—Cold hands are sometimes an indication of nervousness; sometimes it is a constitutional peculiarity. There seems to be no good reason for wanting to cure them, or that there is anything to cure. Many persons would think it a state of things for congratulation.

NATHANIEL.—The complexion of the Saxons was usually fair, and that of the Normans dark; but the families are few indeed who have maintained an untainted descent from either race, and the effect of climate during eight centuries would of itself suffice to destroy all distinctions of that kind.

J. L.—The age argument goes for nothing; the War Office rule is that where a lad looks the age he said he was he is not to be released if it should subsequently appear that he is younger; the only course, therefore, open to the parents of the young man is to pay £10 to get him off within three months.

M. G.—Sponging with a weak solution of benzine collas is the best thing you can use for general greasy stain or perspiration. Spots of candle grease may be removed with blotting-paper and a hot iron, used with caution. We know nothing of "bacon-rind" in this connection.

ALICE.—Tell your people that you are going to have your friends at the house. It is the only way to maintain your self-respect. By-and-by they will learn that you see this young man elsewhere, and then there will be serious trouble. It is better that they hear it from you than from outsiders.

MIRRIE.—It is a mistake to suppose cold drinks are necessary to relieve thirst. Experience shows it to be a fact that hot drinks relieve the thirst and "cool off" the body when it is in an abnormally heated condition better than ice-cold drinks. Hot drinks also have the advantage of aiding digestion, instead of causing debility to the stomach.

FAN.—The best way to clean wall paper is with stale bread, or bread about a day old. To be successful, the paper must be cleaned by firm, downward strokes, one stroke lapping over another, and the bread must be trimmed off or exchanged for a new piece as soon as it becomes soiled. Before beginning to clean with the bread all dust must be removed from the paper with a duster and cloth. Grease spots which have been sunk into the plaster may be removed from wall paper by applying Fuller's earth, powdered French chalk held in place by brown paper. Put a hot iron over the brown paper. This will draw out the grease spot on one or two applications unless the grease has sunk into the plaster, when there seems to be no way of removing it.

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 Glass), a Beautiful Soft Brilliant Polish, which lasts Six Times as Long Without
 Tarnishing as other kinds.

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PART 396. VOL. LXIII.—SEPTEMBER, 1894.

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